

# PRABUDDHA BHARATA

*or* AWAKENED INDIA

A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order  
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896



March 2015

Vol. 120, No. 3

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# THE ROAD TO WISDOM

## SWAMI VIVEKANANDA ON *Conquering The Limited*

Let us be no more the worshippers of creeds or sects with small limited notions of God, but see Him in everything in the universe. If you are knowers of God, you will everywhere find the same worship as in your own heart. Get rid, in the first place, of all these limited ideas and see God in every person—working through all hands, walking through all feet, and eating through every mouth. In every being He lives, through all minds He thinks. He is self-evident, nearer unto us than ourselves. When we shall feel that oneness, we shall be immortal. We are physically immortal even, one with the universe, I live in that one. I am not this limited little being, I am the universal. I am the life of all the sons of the past. I am the soul of Buddha, of Jesus, of Mohammed. I am the soul of the teachers, and I am all the robbers that robbed, and all the murderers that were hanged, I am the universal. Stand up then; this is the highest worship. You are one with the universe. That only is humility—not crawling upon all fours and calling yourself a sinner. That is the highest evolution when this veil of differentiation is torn off. The highest creed is Oneness. I am so-and-so is a limited idea, not true of the real 'I'. I am the universal; stand upon that and ever worship the Highest through the highest form, for God is Spirit and should be worshipped in spirit and in truth. Through lower forms of worship, man's material thoughts rise to spiritual worship



and the Universal Infinite One is at last worshipped in and through the spirit. That which is limited is material. The Spirit alone is infinite. God is Spirit, is infinite; man is Spirit and, therefore, infinite, and the Infinite alone can worship the Infinite. The grandeur of realising these ideas, how difficult it is! I theorise, talk, philosophise; and the next moment something comes against me, and I unconsciously become angry, I forget there is anything in the universe but this little limited self, I forget to say, 'I am the Spirit, what is this trifle to me? I am the Spirit.' I forget it is all myself playing, I forget God, I forget freedom. One moment I say, 'Thy will be done,' and the next moment something comes to try me and I spring up in a rage. The attempt to kill the false 'I', so that the real 'I', the Lord will reign. 'Thy will be done'—every moment the traitor mind rebels against it, yet it must be said, again and again, if we are to conquer the lower self.

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From *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2013), 1.350–53.

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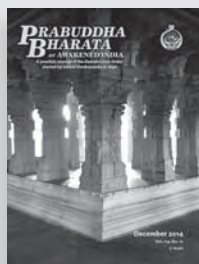
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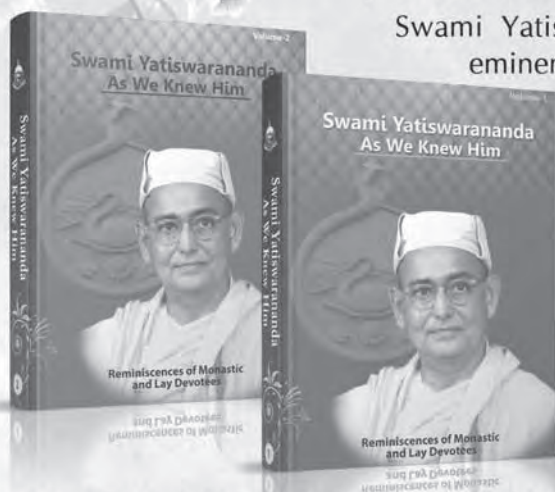
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**Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!**

## Maitrayaniya Upanishad

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Vol. 120, No. 3

### मैत्रायणीय उपनिषत्

अथ किमेतैर्वाऽन्यानां शोषणं महार्णवानां शिखरिणां प्रपतनं ध्रुवस्य प्रचलनं ब्रह्मचनं वातरज्जूनां निमज्जनं पृथिव्याः स्थानादपसरणं सुराणामित्येतद्विधेऽस्मिन् संसारे किं कामोपभोगै-र्यैरेवाशितस्य असकृदिहावर्तनं दृश्यत इत्युद्धर्तुमर्हसि । अन्धोदपानस्थो भेक इवाहम् अस्मिन् संसारे भगवंस्त्वं नो गतिस्त्वं नो गतिः ॥ इति प्रथमः प्रपाठकः ॥ १.४ ॥

*Atha kimetairva'nyanam shoshanam maharnavanam shikharinam prapatanam dhruvasya prachalanam vrashchanam vatarajjunam nimajjanam prithivyah sthanad apasaranam suranam ityetad-vidhe'smin samsare kim kamopabhogaih-yair-eva-ashitasya asakrid-ihavartanam drishyata ity-uddhartum-arhasi. Andhodapanastho bheka ivaham asmin samsare bhagavan tvam no gatis tvam no gatih. Iti prathamah prapathakah.* (1.4)

But what of these? Among other things, there is the drying up of great oceans, falling of mountains, the movement of the fixed pole-star, the cutting of wind-ropes, the submerging of the earth, and the moving away of gods from their places. In such a world, what is the point of enjoying desires? For one who feeds on the desires is seen to return to this world repeatedly. Be pleased to deliver me. In this cycle of transmigratoriness, I am like a frog in a waterless well. Revered Sir, you are our way of deliverance, you are our way of deliverance. Thus ends the first chapter. (1.4)

# THIS MONTH

**F**REEDOM IS ESSENTIAL for growth. Freedom in all spheres of life alone can lead to the complete unfoldment of an individual. This includes religion or faith-systems. Why do we need freedom to believe? What are the common obstacles to such freedom. All these questions are discussed in **Freedom to Believe**.

China is a strong country, not only because of its large population, but also because of its ancient civilization, and recently because of its economy opening up to the world in a big way. Leading thinkers believe that this is one of the most important milestones in recent history. Swami Durgananda, registrar, Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University, recounts his travels in China in **A Monk's Journeys in China**. The first part of this two-part article focuses on the technological development of this mighty nation, achieved in recent years.

Freemasonry is arguably the oldest non-religious brotherhood on earth. The British rule of India brought this doctrine to India and eventually many Indians became Masons. Off and on public interest in Freemasonry has been kindled because of references in popular culture. Its principles and early history in India are discussed in the first instalment of **Masonic Vedanta** by Guy L Beck, a scholar, author, musician, educator, historian of religions, musicologist, Fulbright-Nehru senior research fellow and visiting fellow at the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies, Oxford University, lecturer in Religious Studies and Asian Studies at Tulane University, and adjunct professor of Religious Studies at Loyola University, New Orleans.

A P N Pankaj, a littérateur of repute from Chandigarh, talks about the problems facing the present-day society and the possible ways out in **Moral Dilemmas of the Current Times and the Relevance of Swami Vivekananda**.

In the concluding instalment of **Virchand Raghavji Gandhi—An Indian Spokesman and Jain Scholar**, Dr Satish K Kapoor, a former British Council scholar and registrar of Dayanand Anglo-Vedic University, Jalandhar, tells us how Virchand Gandhi defended Hinduism and Jainism from the attacks by Christian missionaries in the US.

Damon F Lynch, a doctoral student of Cultural Anthropology at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, compares different approaches to the study of mantras in the concluding instalment of **Ways of Knowing Mantras**.

In the fourth instalment of **Memory**, Swami Satyamayananda, Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Kanpur, explores different kinds of memory.

The Self has been given different dimensions by different thought-systems. Indian thought as found in the Upanishads places the Self at the fourth state of awareness beyond the three states of waking, dreaming, and deep sleep. In his new book **Waking, Dreaming, Being**, Evan Thompson, professor of philosophy at the University of British Columbia, portrays the Self as a process and adopts a syncretic approach to its study by combining perspectives from philosophy, meditation, and neuroscience. From this book, we bring you this month's *Manana*.



# *Freedom to Believe*

**W**E WANT FREEDOM. Where are we? What are we? Are we all not on our path to freedom? In our own ways, we are moving towards freedom. Towards that horizon, which has just not yet appeared, something more chimeric than we know. Yet there is hope that it would not always elude us. Someday it would come into our grasp.

Free we have to be. How can we be free is the question. And also, what kind of freedom do we need? Is it freedom where I want to do anything or is it a freedom where I want to be free of want. I want to be like the dry leaf which floats slowly in the air with no rush.

Freedom means different things to different people. The freedom of the nation may not bring freedom to a citizen. Understanding is freedom. Having a grip on ourselves at all times is freedom. Freedom is also expanding our understanding of ourselves to include everything and then we become free from identities, limitations, and boundaries. Such freedom is like the freedom of the sky, a vast expanse of limitless bliss.

Floating in water is freedom, and if we could be floating in the ebb and tide of our lives, then that will be true freedom. No bickering, no fights, no quarrels over petty things. Being free. Breathing in fresh air. Standing in the midst of green fields. Flying with the birds. Drifting in the ocean. Leaning out the window of a moving car. Freedom. How elusive can it be? Are we chasing something we already have? Why worry so much about happiness in life when I can be happy just being myself.

Freedom is not chasing. Freedom is not achieving. Freedom is not holding. It is to let go. To grasp the un-graspable. Freedom is not knowing where to go, and yet continuing our journey. Not the weight of certainty but the fog of uncertainty could be freedom.

Defining freedom would be binding it. Even the definition of freedom should be flowing, transforming, developing, finding new meanings, and instilling new attitudes. Freedom is beyond definition, beyond utterance, beyond form, shape, and expression. You cannot define it, you can only, if at all, experience it. A freedom experienced is no freedom then. That moment goes away. That moment becomes a memory and is bound in matter and thought. That moment is no more a moment

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**No religion is the home of any person. An individual's true home is only one's true personality, free from all boundaries, all limiting adjuncts, free from ignorance.**

---

of freedom. It is no more a memory of freedom but a recalling of bondage. So, freedom has to be free. The concept has to be free. The person has to be free. The understanding has to be free. Why judge? Who will judge whom? Who will free whom? Who is bound and who is free?

To be free is to be capable of holding on to one's convictions, that may change since they would be free themselves. How can such a free mind be bound to a static conception of the ideal of freedom, the supreme principle, God? When for a free mind everything changes in shapes, colours,

feelings, names, forms, and beyond, how can the conception of God be the same? Why should one remain throughout life, a dualist, qualified monist, monist, theist, atheist, worshipper of form, believer of God without form, or the follower of any of the numerous faith-systems? Why should a person be tied to the religion one was born into? Why should one not be free to experiment with religions and as Swami Vivekananda wanted, why should not every person have a unique religion?

The individual is essentially free and should be free to chart the path to the realisation of one's true nature. Does a bird follow maps while flying? Is there a radar monitoring the flight of a fowl? So, why should there be any hullabaloo if some people decide to change their religion out of their own free will and not due to coercion? Freedom should never be obstructed. A person's choice of religion or any faith-system should be free and one should be able to change that religion or faith-system at any point in one's life. There should be no coercion, obstruction, force, or compulsion, to either hold on to or change the religion. If one wishes, let a person change religion as many times as one would change one's clothes, or even more. How could force or coercion influence one to change one's religion? It could be an allurements, enticement, or the promise of a better life by people who have not seen fulfilment—a false promise. False assertions are obstructive to freedom.

No religion is the home of any person. An individual's true home is one's true personality, free from all constraints, all limiting adjuncts, free from ignorance. One's true home is the Self that shines without external light and needs no support. When different lifetimes and bodies are mere stations in the long journey to fulfilment, where does religion—one of numerous thoughts of the body-mind complex—stand in this vast spectrum? If someone reverts to one's regular diet after a regimen of frugal food for shedding

fat, do we say that the person has come back to one's house? No, we don't, because diet is something one has in the home, and by itself is not the home. Just like food, which is just a means of satisfying hunger, religion too is just a means of attaining fulfilment. The way to our true home lies in our fulfilment and not in religion.

An individual's beliefs are sacred and private, and the public has no right to curb the freedom of this private space and intrude into the religious affiliations of an individual. If a person is content with her or his affirmation of religious beliefs, no public body has any business crying foul over the religious belief that a person has adopted. In a free world, a person may express thoughts that need not be vetted by public opinion. The tendency to deny the freedom of a private space in the name of guarding social values—when such freedom is not being used to cause injury—is highly intrusive. While a person should have the right to change one's religion or beliefs at any-time, no person should be allowed to change the religion or beliefs of others, whatever may be the reasons. That would be true religious freedom.

Let us shed our inhibitions about religion, be it about belief in general or wrong understanding of a specific religion. Let us cultivate the courage to believe whatever we want to believe. Let the freedom of our truer freer spirits inspire us to have a multi-faith society, where people would not be questioned about their beliefs, where people would not be discriminated against because of their religion, where people would live with love for all living beings, and not dogmatic allegiance to any particular thought. Why is it that the mind has the pace of the wind? Because, it was meant to think freely. To be free is poetry, a poetry that does not want to be understood. Freedom is flowing honey. The sparkle and the flow are much more valuable than its taste. Come flow with the freedom, be free!



# A Monk's Journeys in China

Swami Durgananda

CHINA IS A MYSTERY to most of us. This country, veiled behind the bamboo curtain in the past, has remained almost unknown to outsiders. But the mystery unravelled is not only delightful but also educative and profitable. Like India, this north-eastern Indian neighbour is of continental size, more populous, with an ancient civilisation. It is also a country that is ardently endeavouring to shed its poverty. This similarity signifies that China could be India's major partner for a brighter future—the combination would prove to be a synergy in economy, a symphony in culture, and a synchronisation on issues of global importance.

What is more important, and is perhaps less recognised, is that as a whole, Asia is different from the West. Western thinking is characterised by analysis, division, and a contrast between the pairs of opposites. Asian thinking is characterised by synthesis, unification, and harmony. Asia thus follows a holistic approach based more on intuition than reason. The West primarily follows deductive reasoning. Asians are dreamers and poets, sensitive and humane, of refined thinking and emotional. Emotion and intuition often act as an engine for growth. There is an immense potential in this for the next leap of human advancement. The West is rational. In contrast, Asia, without being irrational, is suprarational—even mystical.

Now let us turn to this neighbour of India. The author of this article visited China five times



*The Great Wall of China*

in the last two years, exploring the country about three or four weeks each time. Travels included sixty places of historic and cultural importance and forty holy places spanning from Lhasa in the west to Shanghai in the east, from Harbin in the north to Kunming and Hong Kong in the south. This article is based on what was actually seen and experienced and endeavours to take the reader through a virtual tour of that vast Asian country, India's neighbour.

The first impression we get when we enter China is that the country has dramatically modernised itself. At least the cities, and many villages too, are just like those in any developed country, some are even better, and this is true considering various aspects such as appearance, cleanliness, technology, transport, markets, streets, hospitals, universities, parks, roads, footpaths, and systems of operation. The Indians living in China tell us

the tale of how the country was rustic only a few years ago, and the population looked like village-folk. The change has taken place only recently. Let us see where the country stands now. This article is divided into two parts: part one tells the story of China's enormous and astounding infrastructural development while part two tells the story of China's religious and spiritual history.

### **The Infrastructure Marvel**

**Trains •** In 1993, trains in China averaged only a speed of forty-eight kilometres per hour. Since then, through five rounds of 'speed-up' campaigns in 1997, 1998, 2000, 2001, and 2004, the existing tracks were upgraded to reach what is called 'sub-high speeds' of one hundred and sixty kilometres per hour. Later on, with the import of new technology, the trains reached speeds of two hundred kilometres per hour in 2004, two hundred and fifty kilometres per hour in 2007, and three hundred and fifty kilometres per hour in 2008. Since then, a considerable degree of self-sufficiency has been achieved in China, and with it, innovation now continues. It is notable that the current speeds of high-speed trains are higher than the take-off and landing speeds of a jet aircraft. These two moments are critical during the flight of an aircraft because of ground effects and wind excitation, dynamic effects. A high speed train has to remain in this precarious state all through its journey because it remains on the ground. Thus high speed trains are technology intensive.

High speed rail is defined as a railway which

has a track specially built or upgraded for high speed travel—cruising speed of at least two hundred and fifty kilometres per hour—and a specially built rolling stock. There are two types of commercial high speed trains in China today: the bullet train with a speed of three hundred and fifty kilometres per hour and the magnetic levitation, maglev, train with a speed of four hundred and fifty kilometres per hour.

**Bullet train •** The bullet train runs on a conventional track. However, it is specially built and continuously welded. The train has no engine. Instead, every wheel or every axle has a traction motor. Electric power is drawn from overhead wires using specially made pantographs—these are unique because at high speeds, the loss of contact with the twenty-five thousand volt overhead wire may set the train on fire. The train has a sophisticated hydraulic tilting mechanism to counter centrifugal force on curves, thus it does not slow down on turns or even in tunnels. For the driver, there is the special 'in-cab' signalling system on the driver's console because conventional signals are ineffective due to insufficient time for human response at higher speeds.

The bullet train network in China is now more than fourteen thousand kilometres in length<sup>1</sup> and is set to be expanded to thirty-five thousand kilometres by 2020.<sup>2</sup> The current cost of setting up a new bullet train line is about six to ten lakh rupees per meter.

**Maglev Train •** While the bullet train runs on a conventional track, the maglev train floats on a magnetic suspension, which is about one

*Bullet Trains*







*Aerial View of the City of Wuxi*



*Hangzhou Railway Station*

centimetre above the ground. It can remain afloat even when not moving. Clearly, the train has no wheels. This way, the traction resistance is totally eliminated and therefore the train can travel faster than the bullet train. This train too has no engine—a part of the magnetic force is used to propel the train forward. For energy, the maglev train does not need overhead electric wires as the track itself contains the electric supply. The cost of construction of the maglev line today is about twenty to thirty lakh rupees per meter.

The famous Shanghai Maglev is the first and the only commercial high speed maglev in the world. It started its operation in year 2004 and maintains a speed of four hundred and thirty kilometres per hour all through its journey.<sup>3</sup>

**Travelling experience** • Travel on high speed trains is the most thrilling experience in China. Besides, it is convenient, comfortable, speedy, and seats are almost always available. A train goes right through the heart of the city. In comparison, airports are usually too far from the city, the reporting times too early, and food there too expensive.

The maximum speed of the 'G' series bullet trains in China is three hundred and fifty kilometres per hour while that of the 'D' series trains is two hundred and fifty kilometres per hour. The frequency of trains is fairly good. For example, from Shanghai to Beijing—a distance of 1,318 km—there are 19 bullet trains between 7 a.m. and 12 noon. The bullet train looks like an aircraft and the travelling experience is also like that in an aircraft. The seat-to-seat distance is 100 cm or 39 inches—so comfortable that one can leave one's seat without disturbing the fellow passenger. Interestingly, the seats in bullet

trains always face in the direction of travel. This is achieved by rotating every seat at the terminal stations. There is a pantry and a dining car on every train. Overnight bullet trains have berths.

In Shanghai, from the maglev train that maintains a speed of four hundred and thirty kilometres per hour, one may see cars that are going in the same direction on the adjacent expressway and the city streets and houses whipping past and crossing highways shooting behind. In a maglev train, since all the coaches are connected, one may go to the front, and through the glass between the driver's cabin and the rest of the train, see the track ahead through the driver's window. The train is never crowded!

**Express trains** • There are one lakh kilometres of conventional railway lines in China compared to the sixty-five-thousand-kilometre network in India. The 'Z' series and the 'T' series trains run at speeds of one hundred and sixty kilometres per hour and one hundred and forty kilometres per hour respectively. The interior of these coaches are modern, all trains look new, and parts are coated with a durable white coat, evidently an 'aluminium powder coat'. The platforms are at the same level as the floor of the coach, except at small stations. When the train stops a plate is laid at the door of the coach connecting the coach to the platform, so one can drag a suitcase across it. The doors do not open while the train is moving. The toilets have 'vacuum flush' just as on an aircraft. The squat-type commodes also have a vacuum flush.

On express trains, the coach attendant has a small personal cabin in the coach. The attendant keeps one Thermos flask full of hot water

in every bay of the coach for the passengers. The attendant asks the passenger to keep the suitcase properly in case it is protruding from the overhead rack or is lying in the aisle. At night, at the correct time, the attendant closes the window curtains and switches off the lights. An interesting feature of Chinese trains is that after the train starts, the coach attendant exchanges your original ticket with a plastic 'pass', with which you may step out of the train and get back in. Just before your destination, the attendant will come to your seat or berth and again exchange the pass for the ticket. The result of this system is that you automatically get reminded or woken up when your destination arrives.

In all Chinese trains, each coach has a set of three basins in a spacious area, there is a clean dustbin with a garbage bag and even hand wash soap. Boiling hot water is available on all Chinese trains as also on railway stations for drinking as it is usually very cold in China. On an electronic display, the speed, temperature, next station, and other such information is displayed. It is interesting that the availability of toilets is also displayed on an electronic sign board. Importantly, the coach number is displayed inside the coach as well as on the outside. Food service is provided by trolleys on all trains by the train staff—common items are available. No outsiders are permitted to sell in the train or on the platform, and shops are available in the lounge at the station. A pantry car with a dining hall, unbelievably clean, usually with a dining table-cloth, is also found on the express train.

All Chinese trains run on a track that is known as the 'standard gauge' of four feet and eight and a half inches. In contrast, the track in India is the 'Indian broad gauge' of five feet six inches. Due to the shorter width, the Chinese trains do not have side berths; instead, there are spring-loaded seats which fold up when one gets up. These are

not assigned any reservation number and may be used by anyone. There is a long and narrow cantilever board at these side seats which is used as a personal dining table. There is also a tray in a rack below this board where one may throw food waste. This tray is emptied periodically. The bays in the coach have six berths in the three-tier and four berths in a coupe in the first class. There is no equivalent of the Indian two-tier coach in China. The berths are six feet and six inches while in India, they are six feet and three inches long.

Curiously, everywhere the slopes of the earth embankments of railways and that of the roads are covered with concrete diamond grids and turf, planted grass, to prevent erosion. Also, there is continuous fencing along both sides of all railway lines. This prevents animals from getting on the track.

**The Sky Train** • The Shanghai to Lhasa railway line is called the 'Sky Train' because most of its tracks are located in mountains that are more than four thousand meters above sea level. Hauled by two powerful NJ2 diesel locomotives, each of 5,000 horsepower, the train travels the 4,373 km distance from Shanghai to Lhasa. The author did travel on this train and saw that of the total distance, nearly 2,000 km are through the magnificent Himalayan mountains, almost all of that distance is on an elevated track or bridge or tunnel compared to the Konkan Railway that is 736 km long, of which about 400 km are in the mountains. This railway line is a remarkable feat of human achievement—a real marvel! Its construction is a separate story in its own right. Travelling across the magnificent sky-reaching mountains, often covered with snow—500 km of which is permafrost, permanently frozen—one sees stunning breathtaking scenery: idyllic lands, clear skies, vast clear lakes, wild animals, and meandering rivers keeping constant company. The train has oxygen supply in each coach and a doctor on-board.



*Shanghai-Lhasa Sky-Train*

### ***Railway Stations***

Most railway stations in China are now modern. In large cities, the railway stations are just like airports. They are centrally air-conditioned, provide a lounge with chairs for almost everyone to sit, and offer conveniences such as the escalator, automatic ticketing, and so on. Surprisingly, not the least bit of litter is seen anywhere. It is interesting that the system of operation too is like that of the airports. There are separate floors for departure and arrival like the airport. For departure, all must go through security where baggage is checked by X-ray and individuals by metal detectors. All passengers wait in a comfortable lounge until the train arrival time. There is a boarding gate which then opens, tickets are checked electronically and all passengers proceed to the platform, without pushing or jostling with one another, where they queue up at the location of their respective coaches. When the train arrives, the coach attendant stands at the door and checks the ticket once again. The attendant remains standing like a soldier as long as the train is in station. No one who is not a passenger is allowed to come on the platform. Visitors can, in restricted cases, come up to the lounge.

### ***Buses and Bus Stations***

What facilities and conveniences are provided at bus stations! Comfortable waiting areas,

convenient ticketing windows, large open spaces, clean restaurants and shops, bank ATMs, and even escalators. There is a boarding gate for getting into the bus from the station. The buses are all of a luxury type, and many provide complimentary snack-packs in the bus.

All city buses in China are almost of the same design—two or three seats abreast, air-conditioning on most buses, automatic doors, rear-mount engine, gearless drive, power steering and low floor chassis. A closed-circuit TV for showing the exit door is also provided to the driver on many buses. There is no conductor. One enters from the driver side door, puts money in the slot, usually the same price for going anywhere! These days, most people use a plastic card for payment, the card must be placed on a machine, which deducts the fare. Exit is through the middle, larger door. Some city buses and some long distance buses are double-deckers.

There are twenty cities now in which the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) operates in China servicing over 650 km over all these cities. By international standards, to be called a BRT, the bus, ideally a train of buses, must have a fully dedicated lane for the most part of the journey, a platform at the station at the same level as that of the bus floor, ticketing on the station to save time, and priority in traffic at intersections to avoid signal delay. The Chinese BRTs look very modern.



## Roads

China's preference for a planned economy has given it broad roads—very broad and straight roads. This leaves many of them sparse or almost vacant! The most noteworthy features of city roads are that besides the 3+3 or 2+2 lanes for vehicles, there are separate lanes for two-wheelers on either side—each of these two-wheeler lanes on either side is of two-car widths separated from the main road by a meridian. Beyond these lanes one finds large footpaths, so large that vehicles are usually parked in that space, still leaving a lot of space for people to walk. A



Chengdu City

remarkable aspect of city roads is that at every crossing of large roads, the four corners are left without buildings. This means not only increased visibility for the turning traffic, but also more space for pedestrians.

The footpaths are laid in stones or slabs that seem to have machined surfaces with rectangular protrusions for grip. This gives it a high class finish. These may be, in some cases, precast in cement of the same design.

Interestingly, not only the city roads but also the highways have hedge planted along

both sides and at the median. Some even have flowers over long stretches. How they maintain the plantation, trimmed, watered, and cleaned on such a large scale is amazing and leaves us wonderstruck!

## General Observations

As mentioned already, the country is remarkably clean. What can easily be noted is that there are dustbins everywhere, on streets, public places, even in caves and also in city buses—so one need not drop trash on the ground. People too are very disciplined. All dustbins are of modern design, use garbage bags, and have two compartments labelled 'recyclable' and 'non-recyclable'.

Besides, there are sweepers equipped with electric two-wheelers with a cleaning gear. These employees of the municipality continuously clean any waste that might have fallen inadvertently on the ground.

An important human necessity is public toilets. While travelling, the author noticed that there were a lot of public toilets in various places. Signs at the nearest public toilet can also be found like signs with street names. Surprisingly, the public toilets are so wonderfully clean—again, the credit goes to the general level of discipline and public awareness, modern technology, and government concern.

Banks and post offices in China resemble those in the West in appearance, neatness, and technology. These government services offer one



stop clearance—you don't have to go from window to window.

The universities in China usually have large campuses. The dining halls here are indeed a scene to be seen. An escalator takes you to the first floor directly from the street. One enters a large hall full of dining tables. One entire side of the hall is usually used to dispense food items. The cooking gadgets are state-of-the-art, and employees wear uniforms including 'toque blanche', white hat, hair-nets, aprons, and so on, and use hand-gloves or a pair of tongs to handle food items. Students use plastic cards to pay. Food items are carried on a tray and after eating the trays are deposited at a particular place just as in the universities in the US. Curiously, some items come in a pot with a light-weight wax stove under it. This keeps the item hot while eating.

Another striking feature is that at many locations, public bicycles are available for going from one place to another. A bicycle may be released from its stand by putting coins or by inserting a plastic card in a machine. After reaching the destination, the bicycle is left in another such station.

In China, there are twenty-four hour convenience stores exactly like those in the West. These stores sell a range of consumable items that are of immediate necessity such as food, toiletries, medicines, newspapers, batteries, stationery, and even automobile components. They are usually small in size and may be located at petrol stations and, as the name indicates, are open all the twenty-four hours.

The malls and shopping complexes are so elegant that some of them clearly excel those in the West. These places have conveniences such as escalators, restaurants, gardens, entertainment arcades, and even skating rinks inside the building.

There are underground shopping complexes in some locations in cities below the road

crossings. These are also used to cross the road. The street lights are never ordinary tube lights but have aesthetic designs.

The most delightful aspect of Chinese towns is their parks and public places. After a day's work, one may retire there. They are very artistically made, and with much attention given to finer details: leisurely meandering garden paths cobbled with round pebbles or cement slabs aesthetically placed, fountains, small waterfalls, rivulets and little bridges on them, small artificial hillocks, shrubbery and cactus gardens, boulders randomly placed in and around ponds or lakes, stepping stones to walk across water, long wooden walkways on swamps, and many other amusing things. Walkways over ponds are not straight and have turns here and there. There are hanging bridges, artificial tunnels made in boulders and many more delights. The entire place is strewn with greenery and flowers, well-watered, neatly cut and maintained. Every lake, pond, river or canal appears to be wonderfully designed as to build beauty around it.

*(To be concluded)*

## Notes

1. The 14,000 kilometres count includes, for example, Guangzhou-Beijing-Harbin 3,618 km stretch, Beijing-Shanghai 1,318 km stretch, Xi-an to Zhengzhou 511 km—all at a speed of 350 kmph; and Ningbo-Chengdu 2,064 km stretch, Ningbo to Shenzhen 1,309 km stretch, Hangzhou to Zhuzhou 958 km stretch—all at a speed of 250 kmph.
2. Countries other than China that have bullet trains now are Spain 3,100 km, Japan 2,664 km, France 2,036 km, Germany 1,334 km, Italy 923 km and also others like Russia, Turkey, South Korea, and Taiwan.
3. Two low speed maglevs are currently in commercial operation: 1) from Tobu to Kyuryo in Japan 9 km long at a speed of 100 kmph, and 2) in Daejeon in South Korea one km long at a low speed.

# Masonic Vedanta

Guy L Beck

## Introduction

THE INTERACTION BETWEEN Freemasonry and Vedanta in India produced a unique confluence of religious ideas, termed here as Masonic Vedanta. After its founding in London in 1717 CE, Freemasonry, a fraternity espousing nondenominational monotheism, universal brotherhood, and charity, accompanied the worldwide expansion of the British Empire. India became a critical testing ground for these tenets, as ‘polytheistic Hindus’ seeking membership were restructuring their beliefs according to reformed monotheistic tendencies arising in colonial India. By the nineteenth century, Hindu reformers and reform movements, such as Sri Ramakrishna and the Brahmo Samaj, had embraced a unified Brahman, both personal and impersonal, as taught in Vedanta. This revived Vedanta, also called neo-Vedanta, enabled urban Hindus like Prosonno Coomarr Dutt, the first Bengali Mason, to comply with Masonic requirements of belief in one God. Drawing on current scholarship, this essay argues that the universal tenets of Freemasonry were compatible in principle with the new Vedanta to form a creative fusion of the East and the West, that is Masonic Vedanta, which flourished in both India and the US, as especially observed through the life and teachings of Swami Vivekananda, a Bengali Mason and Vedantin who taught universal brotherhood and practical Vedanta, and Albert Pike (1809–91), an American Masonic leader and scholar of Hinduism and the Vedas. Three examples of twentieth-century

Hindu-Masonic syncretism are presented followed by a conclusion.

‘A Grand Master of the Craft am I, and a Lodge in the Third Degree I will open, and we’ll raise the head priests and the Chiefs of the villages,’ said Daniel Dravot in Rudyard Kipling’s, *The Man Who Would Be King*.<sup>1</sup> A confluence of ideas depends on mutual compatibility between two traditions. In the case of Freemasonry and Vedanta, the complex processes of interaction between these two historically separate traditions were brought to creative fruition under the aegis of the British Empire in India. As part of the infrastructure of British imperialism, Freemasonry first accompanied the administrators and servicemen of the British East India Company, and was then permanently established throughout the subcontinent. Initially, non-Europeans were excluded for reasons only of expedience and prejudicial habit. However, as Indians attended English schools in the cities of Calcutta, Madras, and Bombay, the issue of Masonic membership was raised sporadically by both young Indians and progressive Englishmen. College-educated Hindus, initially perceived by their stewards as enmeshed in polytheism and superstition and thus unfit for Masonic consideration, proved resilient to these charges and reformulated their religious views in terms of a unified theistic God and a belief in the immortality of the soul, the only ‘religious’ qualifications for Masonic membership. This revision was not a new step, however, as it harkened back to the Hindu philosophy of Vedanta as first

outlined in the Upanishads. Vedanta, as an ancient form of Hindu monotheistic pantheism, was subsequently revived by reformers in the nineteenth century as neo-Vedanta and became a ready catalyst for rendering Hindus, in principle, as acceptable candidates for Masonic membership. Although there were some administrative and bureaucratic hurdles that delayed the ultimate success of allowing Hindus full Masonic access, the end product, termed here as 'Masonic Vedanta,' spawned further syncretistic speculation in Masonic speeches and publications. The 'Masonic' part of 'Masonic Vedanta' rested primarily on humanitarianism and the practical application of charity and brotherly love, whereas Vedanta contributed pantheistic monotheism and the timeless wisdom of ancient India.

This essay first presents a brief history of Freemasonry in Europe and colonial India, and then outlines some basic features of Vedanta. In describing the process whereby Hindus became Masons, it explores the close interaction between nineteenth-century Vedanta philosophy in India, also known as neo-Vedanta, and the Masonic teachings of universal brotherhood, charity, and belief in one supreme Being. The resulting confluence termed here as 'Masonic Vedanta' is a unique amalgam that was exemplified in the life and teachings of two famous nineteenth-century figures: Swami Vivekananda, the internationally renowned Hindu monk who was involved in both Vedanta and Freemasonry, and the American Freemason and esoteric thinker Albert Pike, who was deeply absorbed in Vedanta. This historical process of interaction is further supported by reference to three publications demonstrating Hindu-Masonic syncretism in early twentieth-century India. The various points of intersection among these diverse sources reflect a new and intriguing confluence of religious ideas; a creative fusion that

has received less attention in scholarship yet is no less provocative in its vision for the future.

### **Freemasonry**

Freemasonry, Masonry, 'the Craft', or 'the Lodge' is the largest fraternal organisation in the world, and the first 'alternative religion' to reach global proportions. While the personal involvement of a brother, son, father, uncle, or grandfather in a Masonic lodge is acknowledged by many people throughout Europe and America, the vast international and historical canvass of Freemasonry is seldom comprehended fully, even by its most active members. Rooted in the medieval stonemason's craft as well as aspects of Renaissance philosophy, Freemasonry was officially inaugurated with the creation of the Grand Lodge of England in London on 24 June 1717. Coterminous with the Age of Reason, Freemasonry boasts a roster of members that reads like the more distinguished names of the European Enlightenment: Goethe, Mozart, Voltaire, Frederick the Great, Gibbon, Lessing, Herder, Mesmer, Fichte, Burke, Pope, and Swift, among many others. In addition, prominent Founding Fathers of America participated in Freemasonry, including George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Paul Revere, and John Hancock.

The standard form of Freemasonry since 1717 is speculative, as opposed to operative. The term 'Operative Masons' refers to stonemasons responsible for building the Gothic cathedrals during the Late Middle Ages. As these nomadic workers formed guilds, they became exclusive and developed secret rituals, codes, and passwords in order to distinguish themselves from other craft guilds. The word 'Freemason' was once a technical term describing a specialist worker in stone: 'One who worked in freestone—usually limestone—capable of being immediately carved for decorative purposes. It

has been demonstrated that Freemason—in an operative context—is a contraction of freestone mason.<sup>2</sup> By the end of the seventeenth century, with the decrease of church building in Europe, the fraternity began admitting non-Operatives: men of letters, philosophers, royalty, clergymen, scientists, and barristers. The tools of the stonemason, extracted out of their once

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**The only religious prerequisite for initiation of a candidate into the Craft is the belief in one supreme God and the acceptance of the doctrine of the immortality of the soul.**

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Operative context, began to symbolise the moral teachings of the new fraternity. For example, the trowel stood for the leveling of the ‘cement’ of brotherhood, the plumb for uprightness, and the square for fairness, and so on. Speculative Freemasonry also absorbed occult themes deriving from its occasional association with Rosicrucian, Knights Templar, Alchemy, and Jewish Kabbalah traditions.

On the surface, the religious perspective of Freemasonry resembles deism, the rational monotheism of the European Enlightenment. The Masonic God, as a kind of Newtonian clockmaker, is the ‘Great Architect of the Universe’. Rather than a dogmatic assertion, it is an ‘umbrella concept’ aiming to include varieties of religious belief. Three Masonic principles include friendship, morality, and brotherly love. The term ‘Craft’ refers specifically to the three degrees of Entered Apprentice, Fellow Craft, and Master Mason. The third degree of Master Mason is required of a candidate in order to be regarded as a full ‘Mason’. The only religious prerequisite for initiation of a candidate into the Craft is the belief in one supreme God and the acceptance of the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. All of the other numerous

Masonic degrees and rites such as, Royal Arch, Scottish Rite, Mystic Shrine, and Knights Templar, though containing elaborate symbolism and esoteric wisdom, are purely optional.

Masonic scholar W L Wilmshurst, in *The Meaning of Masonry*, has summarised the religious dimensions of Freemasonry with reference to its purpose:

Masonry ... is a system of religious philosophy in that it provides us with a doctrine of the universe and of our place in it. It indicates whence we are come and whither we may return. It has two purposes. Its first purpose is to show that man has fallen away from a high and holy centre to the circumference or externalized condition in which we now live; to indicate that those who so desire may regain that centre by finding the centre in ourselves for, since Deity is as a circle whose centre is everywhere, it follows that a divine centre, a ‘vital and immortal principle’, exists within ourselves by developing which we may hope to regain our lost and primal stature. The second purpose of the Craft doctrine is to declare the way by which that centre may be found within ourselves, and this teaching is embodied in the discipline and ordeals delineated in the three degrees.<sup>3</sup>

Wilmshurst places the ultimate source of Masonic wisdom in the East:

To those deep persistent questionings which present themselves to every thinking mind, What am I? Whence come I? Whither go I?, Masonry offers emphatic and luminous answers. Each of us, it tells us, has come from that mystical ‘East’, the eternal source of all light and life, and our life here is described as being spent in the ‘West’ (that is, in a world which is the antipodes of our original home, and under conditions of existence as far removed from those we came from and to which we are returning, as is West from East in our ordinary computation of space). Hence every Candidate upon admission finds himself, in a state of darkness,



in the West of the Lodge. ... Hence in the E. A. [Entered Apprentice] degree, we ask, 'As a Mason, whence come you?' and the answer, coming from an apprentice (i.e., from the natural man of undeveloped M of knowledge) is 'From the West,' since he supposes that his life originated in this world. But, in the advanced degree of M. M. [Master Mason] the answer is that he comes 'From the East,' for by this time the Mason is supposed to have so enlarged his knowledge as to realize that the primal source of life is not in the 'West,' not in this world; that existence upon this planet is but a transitory sojourn, spent in search of 'the genuine secrets,' the ultimate realities, of life; and that as the spirit of man must return to God who gave it, so he is now returning from this temporary world of 'substituted secrets' to that 'East' from which he originally came (29–30).

Wilmschurst later states emphatically that, 'All human life, having originated in the mystical "East" and journeyed into this world which, with us, is the "West", must return again to its source' (48).

From the West to the East, the stepwise progression toward perfection through the three degrees of Masonry is said to form a ground plan for the spiritual uplift of humanity:

From grade to grade the candidate is being led from an old to an entirely new quality of life. He begins his Masonic career as the natural man; he ends it by becoming through its discipline, a regenerated perfected man. To attain this transmutation, this metamorphosis of himself, he is taught first to purify and subdue his sensual nature; then to purify and develop his mental nature; and finally, by utter surrender of his old life and losing his soul to save it, he rises from the dead a Master, a just man made perfect, with larger consciousness and faculties, an efficient instrument for use by the Great Architect in His plan of rebuilding the Temple of fallen humanity and capable of initiating and

advancing other men to a participation in the same great work' (46–7).

The Western Masonic quest for Eastern wisdom found a ready storehouse in Indian Vedanta.

### **Freemasonry and the British Empire**

While there is a considerable wealth of historical material on European and American Freemasonry,<sup>4</sup> until recently there was a lacunae on the effects of Freemasonry on various parts of the world during British colonialism. This perpetuated the misleading assumption that imperialism was defined primarily by notions of the superiority of 'Christian civilisation'. Jessica L Harland-Jacobs, in *Builders of Empire: Freemasons and British Imperialism, 1717-1927*, compels us to rethink the entire empire scenario in terms of universalistic fraternalism, arguing that the British Empire was essentially a worldwide 'fraternal enterprise': 'My argument that the modern world's first and most successful fraternal organization was, from its very beginnings, intimately bound up with imperialism suggests that to a very great extent the British Empire was a fraternal enterprise.' She has duly noted the lack of scholarship on colonial Freemasonry: 'Freemasonry's transfer to Europe and its subsequent role in European societies has occupied several historians' attention, but its concurrent spread outside Europe has garnered little analysis. ... Here was a European institution, but it was a European institution with a global reach. To bypass this basic fact is to neglect a critical and defining characteristic of eighteenth-century Freemasonry' (31). Further implications of her work underscore the need to view Freemasonry not as an obscure men's club, esoteric religion, or secret society, but as a fundamentally powerful dynamic behind the emergence and spread of modern civilisation.

Harland-Jacobs described the dissemination process as the establishment of a vast worldwide

Masonic network that was linked together on all levels: 'As Freemasonry spread throughout the empire, it became an expansive network that connected men across vast distances. ... While some networks operate only on a local scale, others ... function concurrently on a variety of levels: local, national, regional, and even global. ... A shared Masonic ideology, a Masonic lingua franca, and complex administrative structures and policies linked these elements together' (23). The Grand Lodge of England, as the 'Mother Lodge', retained control over this network and its rapid expansion:

The Grand Lodge ... started to extend its authority into the English counties and beyond Britain's shores and in the process became the central node in a nascent Masonic network. As such, it performed a variety of governing functions including standardizing Masonic practices, setting up guidelines for the establishment of new lodges, enacting legislation to guide members and lodges, overseeing the membership, and administering a charity fund (24).

Yet the bond between the empire and the colonies was only as strong as the Masonic associations of its participants: 'It is doubtful that Freemasonry would have become an imperial institution had the soldiers, administrators, and colonists who built the empire not felt so strongly about maintaining their Masonic affiliations while abroad' (32).

'Brotherhood in Masonry was envisioned as a subset of a wider universal fraternalism that Masons like to refer to as, "the common fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man"' (19). According to the rules, any man, regardless of his religion, race, or creed 'who professed belief in a supreme being and was over the age of twenty' (ibid.), was eligible for admission into Masonry. 'It was this latitudinarianism that enabled Freemasonry to serve, according to its Constitutions,

as "a centre of union and the means of conciliating true friendship among persons that must have remain'd at a perpetual distance"' (ibid.). As explained, 'Masonic fraternalism was thus not just about British men taking care of one another in strange colonial environments, but also about believing in a basic affinity with "others" encountered in those strange colonial environments. Not surprisingly, the exigencies of imperial rule consistently put to the test Freemasons' commitment to the idea of universal brotherhood' (19).

The presence of Freemasonry outside of Europe brought it into direct confrontation with non-Europeans who, while trained to assist in the affairs of empire, gradually sought a more secure place within it. The Masonic universal principles were now to be seriously tested: 'Meanwhile, outside the settlement colonies, indigenous men of various religious and racial backgrounds had begun seeking admission into Masonry. The empire became a practical testing ground of Freemasons' commitment to their ideology of cosmopolitan brotherhood in an age of increasingly racialized attitudes' (6). Yet the developing situation became more complex as indigenous members may have had ulterior motives for membership: 'As it turned out, many indigenous elites were attracted to Masonry because of its ideology of cosmopolitan brotherhood, an ideology that could be used as much to undermine as to uphold British imperialism' (7). Among all of the various points of contact between Freemasonry and indigenous natives in the colonies, it was in India that the principles of universal fraternalism would not only be tested, but become the basis for new forms of creative syncretism, that is Masonic Vedanta.

### ***Freemasonry in India***

Always a fertile ground for the formation of diverse religions, India was the birthplace of

Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism. India has also sheltered many religious refugees from other parts of the world. For example, many Jews found refuge in southern India after the Jerusalem temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE. When St Thomas the Apostle allegedly arrived in India with a small following in about 52 CE, he is believed to have planted the seeds for a permanent Indian Christian community. The Zoroastrians or Parsees found asylum when they were driven out of Iran in the tenth century. India is also home to the third largest Muslim population in the world. When the Tibetan Buddhists were persecuted in their own land by the Communist Chinese, hundreds of refugees found safety in India after 1959. All these occurrences exemplify the tolerance, diversity, and understanding in a South Asia permeated with Hindu values and ideals. When Freemasonry first arrived in India, the fraternity of universal brotherhood found a ready environment, seasoned by centuries of religious toleration, for the practical application of its own principles of tolerance.

On 28 December 1728, a group of English Masons residing in Calcutta petitioned the Grand Lodge of England to form a Provincial Grand Lodge in India: 'A petition was presented to the chair signed by several persons (being masons) now living at Fort William in Bengal in the East Indies, wherein they acknowledged the authority of the Grand Master of England, and humbly praying to be constituted a Regular Lodge.'<sup>6</sup> The Grand Master approved the petition on 6 February 1729, and authorised Brother George Pomfret to form a regular lodge at Fort William. Captain Brother Ralph Farwinter was appointed Provincial Grand Master for East India in Bengal, and Brother James Dawson was appointed Provincial Grand Master for East Indies. According to the record, there is mention of Captain Farwinter establishing Lodge No. 72 at Fort William, Calcutta in 1730.<sup>7</sup> Fort William Lodge

was a 'military lodge' composed of soldiers and members of the British East India Company. Military lodges were instrumental in spreading the Craft throughout the British Empire.

The oldest continuing Masonic lodge in India is the Star in the East No. 67, established in Calcutta in 1740. The Provincial Grand Lodge of Madras was established in 1752 and the Provincial Grand Lodge of Bombay was established in 1758. A Masonic lodge was established in Surat in 1798, while Poona had a Masonic lodge in 1818. Several lodges were established in Pondicherry under the jurisdiction of the Grand Orient of France in the 1780s. Most major civic events were attended with Masonic ceremony, especially the 'laying of the cornerstone' for many new government buildings like the New Custom House, Parliament, Writers' Building, and

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**Brotherhood was envisioned as a subset of a wider universal fraternalism that Masons like to refer to as, 'the common fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man.'**

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the High Court in Calcutta and Bombay. Early Patrons of the Craft in colonial India included the first Governor-General Lord Hastings, Lord Dalhousie, Lord Mayo, the Earl of Moira, Lord Bentinck, and Lord Prinsep.

In early colonial times the British neither encouraged nor informed the Indian subjects about Freemasonry. Masonry had occupied a prominent place within the British Empire and was not something to be handed over quickly to the native Indians. Masonic lodges were closed venues where the Europeans could mingle socially and not have to mix with their Indian subjects. But by the end of the nineteenth century, members of the Indian elite, Muslim Nawabs, Hindu Maharajas, philosophers, professionals, and administrators were joining Freemasonry in droves.

The British colonial culture gradually interacted on many levels with the growing Bengali elite from which the earliest Indian members of Freemasonry were drawn. 'The arena for this interaction was the city of Calcutta. The participants in the interaction were the colonial officers, professionals (educators, scholars, doctors, and lawyers), businessmen, and missionaries from England and the urban, Western-educated, Hindu upper-caste Bengali elite'.<sup>8</sup> After the British established control over Bengal in 1757, 'many Hindu upper-caste Bengalis (Brahmans, Kayasthas, and Baidyas) entered into relations with British commercial, financial, and administrative organizations in Calcutta, from which they realized great economic benefits' (104). At the time of the establishment of British authority, there existed 'an elite society in Bengal whose tastes and manners were cosmopolitan, who was often more learned in Persian than in Sanskrit, and who was caught up in administrative and commercial affairs. Members of this group were quick to reach out for a place in the new system, not only in the areas of administration and commerce but in the spheres of culture and social exchange as well'.<sup>9</sup> One of the ways in which the rising class of Hindu elites sought inclusion in the fruits of empire was in their being accepted into the fraternal association of Masons.

(To be continued)

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# ***Moral Dilemmas of the Current Times and the Relevance of Swami Vivekananda***

**A P N Pankaj**

He who can connect the pain of his heart  
With the miseries of all people,  
Who can bend the course of Time to the utmost  
In the desired direction;  
He is the man of the era—  
Society's chosen teacher of the Law,  
With his light  
He purges the darkness from every heart.<sup>1</sup>

**A** PART FROM BEING our collective salutations to Swami Vivekananda, these lines also draw our attention to three cardinal characteristics of a prophet, a person of many millennia. The first is the ability to empathise. Empathy is not just sympathy. It is not merely the sentiment which drives a person to lend one's shoulder to the one who is distressed. An empathetic person not only steps into the shoes of a suffering individual and relates oneself to or identifies with the problem, but after understanding the problem, returns to one's own shoes and taking an objective view, tries to offer a solution. The second characteristic is that the prophet turns the wheel of time into a specific, positive direction. And the third characteristic is that the prophet shakes the slumber, arouses the spirit of society steeped in debilitating darkness and inspires it to move into the zone of the rising sun and thereby fills the firmament with the light of self-awareness, followed by bliss.

Before discussing these characteristics in relation to Swamiji, let me first discuss the issues of moral dilemma of yore and our times. Dilemma,

as we all know, is a state of confusion, or the predicament of choosing between two alternatives, one advantageous and the other desirable. While it is important to deliberate the issues of contemporary times, we must remember that every age has its own sets of dilemmas. In every age, there are times when individuals, societies, or nations seem to be engulfed in dilemmas about their own verities and desperately seek to be guided into light, and a new dawn. In every age there are individuals who give voice to this silent agony preparing thereby the ground for some luminous appearance on the horizon. In this context, I would like to first recall the questions of the later stages of the Rig Veda where the seer speaks of the mystifying darkness: 'There was darkness enveloped in darkness in the beginning. All this universe was an undifferentiated homogeneity like water.'<sup>2</sup> In the Rig Veda, the internal dilemma, the spiritual puzzle, spurs the seers to raise questions of deep philosophical significance: 'Who verily knows and who can here declare it, whence it was born and whence comes this creation?' (10.129.6). And from this disturbing quest, this restlessness, this darkness, they 'discovered the existent's kinship in the non-existent' (ibid.). But even this answer was a question which led to the Vedantic thoughts culminating in the genius of Vivekananda, who made it a living, poetic, and practical way of life.

Then, thousands of years ago, when the battlefield of Kurukshetra reverberated with the sounds of the hoofs of horses, conch shells, and

swords, and the senses of the great warrior Arjuna were benumbed, he gave voice to the agony of a decadent society on the horns of dilemma. He didn't speak just for himself but his contemporary world as well: 'With my nature overpowered by weak commiseration, with a mind bewildered about duty, I supplicate you. Tell me for certain that which is better; I am your disciple. Instruct me who have taken refuge in you.'<sup>3</sup> Metaphorically, Arjuna raises these issues sitting on the wheel of time gone static; in the field of action but on the horns of dilemma: 'We do not know this as well as to which is the better for us, and whether we shall win, or whether they shall conquer us' (32). He not only cannot decide whether he should accept defeat or fight for victory because even in victory, he sees defeat. On those wheels of immobility, he is driven out by Sri Krishna into the luminous zone, the zone of Bhagavadgita, which is not just for Arjuna or his times, but also for all the coming generations and times.

Then there are the Buddha, Acharya Shankara, and Ramanuja. Even though we revere them as our religious or spiritual masters, they were essentially the products of their times, the times of the moral crises of their respective times. Much later came Kabir, Guru Nanak and his tradition of the Sikh gurus, Jnaneshwar, Tukaram, Tirumular, and others. In our own times, we had Gandhi. Stories of the Western world are not very different. And I quote a representative case of Bertrand Russell:

In the absence of any guiding principle, politics becomes a naked struggle for power ... what had happened in the great age of Greece happened again in Renaissance Italy: traditional moral restraints disappeared, because they were seen to be associated with superstition; the liberation from fetters made individuals energetic and creative, producing a rare florescence of genius; but the anarchy and treachery which inevitably resulted from the decay of morals made Italians collectively impotent, and they fell.<sup>4</sup>

Then came the sixteenth century and the Reformation, and Russell continues:

the papacy remained as an institution, and extracted huge tribute from Germany and England, but these nations, which were still pious, could feel no reverence for the Borgias and Medicis, who professed to save souls from purgatory in return for cash which they squandered on luxury and immorality. National motives, economic motives, and moral motives all combined to strengthen the revolt against Rome. ... [Martin] Luther's theological innovations were welcomed by rulers and peoples alike throughout the greater part of northern Europe (ibid.).

Let us now revert to the current times and look at the scenario in the light of Russell's remarks. There is a boom of energy and creativity, activity, and innovations, some of the epoch-making developments in human history are taking place around us, whether in the fields of medicine and health care, nuclear science, space research, communication and information technology, engineering, and architecture. Many social, religious, and spiritual organisations are engaged in genuine selfless work to bring the society out of the morass into which it seems to be sinking. The lifespan is increasing and notwithstanding occasional threats of deceleration, the wealth of nations is also growing. India is also contributing to these momentous developments.

One cannot say that, in relative terms, Indians are worse off. But aren't they? A large mass of people suffers from the problems of hunger, ill-health, illiteracy, unemployment, and dire poverty. To use Rabindranath Tagore's famous lines, we are yet to be a nation 'where the mind is without fear and the head is held high'.<sup>5</sup> Indian women suffer from an abysmal sense of insecurity. Every morning the newspaper brings the news of gloom, doom, and sensation, even as the visual media assaults public eyes and ears with them. Stories of corruption abound. The

ubiquity of CCTV cameras and sting operations reminds us of George Orwell's novels, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Animal Farm*, with the warning that 'Big Brother is watching'.<sup>6</sup> Distrust, mistrust, and suspicion prevail. Society seems to be fast losing, though it hasn't yet completely lost—its moral moorings, its anchorage. In all fields—social, political, educational, bureaucratic, administrative, economic, even religious, and the so-called spiritual, there seems to be anarchy, even downright degeneration of values and demoralising directionlessness.

How is it affecting the youth—the future of our society? They seem to be verging on cynicism. In an interesting conversation between Swami Atmarupananda of the Ramakrishna Order and a novice of the Order, the latter tells the swami that he was not interested in studying Sanskrit and scriptures. When told by the swami that in the Order, one needs to be versed in scriptures, the novice responds, 'My path is to question, it was necessary to know something about the subject. Even questioning is an end in itself'.<sup>7</sup> And the dialogue ends. The youth today do not want to listen. They want to have their own way, walk in their own direction, but the irony is that they don't care to know which is the way, which direction they ought to follow, and what is their destination. All they see in their mind's eye and aspire for is the fat salary package, luxurious living, and a libertarian lifestyle.

There is a lot of information and mind-boggling rate of obsolescence. Most of the information is, in any case, fit for garbage cans. Swami Vivekananda says:

Education is not the amount of information that is put into your brain and runs riot there, undigested, all your life. We must have life-building, man-making, character-making assimilation of ideas. If you have assimilated five ideas and made them your life and character,

you have more education than any man who has got by heart a whole library. 'The ass carrying its load of sandalwood knows only the weight and not the value of the sandalwood.' If education is identical with information, the libraries are the greatest sages in the world, and encyclopaedias are the Rishis.<sup>8</sup>

In general, we see that there is no respect left for elders. Literature that elevates and suggests the right direction is considered to be nonsense. Teachers are not supposed to know better than the students. Parents are meant only to support their children financially. There is no need for value orientation or of a spiritual master. Mammon is God and Cupid is the deity: lust and gold are the divine pursuits.

But then youth alone are not to blame. They don't have role models, except from movies, TV, or easy money-making heroes of the business world. The world of religion is increasingly getting peopled by charlatans, impostors, and libertines, who, like the priests of the time of Martin Luther, are ready to exchange God and all his bounty with cash. Parents, in the first place, don't have time for their children and if and when they have it, they don't know what, in the name of values, should be shared with them. Although we hear these days, in some aristocratic quarters, about the 'quality time' the parents take out for their children, one really does not know what it really means or what is done in that time. Educational institutions are the profiteering dens and government schools, the proverbial *sarkari* establishments. The question is where and what would the students learn that will sustain them when they are at the crossroads of life and face existential dilemmas? Who and what would provide them with emotional and intellectual sustenance and strength? They are mentally so fragile that in the face of a tiny failure or a small challenge, they are driven to suicide or,

like Arjuna, get into the rear seat of the chariot, saying: 'I shall not fight.'<sup>9</sup>

The question today then is what should our society and in particular our youth do? The Vedas emphasise the authenticity of speech, mind, and concentration: 'May my speech be based on (i.e. accord with) the mind; may my mind be based on speech.'<sup>10</sup> But this authenticity has been replaced with double-talk, and the span of concentration has terribly reduced, thanks to audio-visual information, with the attention flitting by the seconds. Then the Upanishads talk of truth, righteousness, and respect for the elders and the guests: 'Speak the truth, Practise righteousness ... Let your mother be a goddess unto you. Let your father be a god unto you. Let your teacher be a god unto you. Let your guest be a god unto you.'<sup>11</sup> And the teacher advises the student who is taking his leave from the teacher's abode, and entering the householder life that, if on any occasion the latter is on the horns of dilemma, perplexed about the course of action he should follow on a particular issue, he should search in his neighbourhood where he would find wise, experienced, and capable persons to provide him guidance: 'Then, should you have any doubt with regard to duties or customs, you should behave in those matters just as Brāhmaṇas do, who may happen to be there and who are able deliberators' (ibid.). Do we have such teachers who themselves have the character and moral conviction to so advise? Are there any moral counsellors in the neighbourhood? More importantly, do we know who lives in our neighbourhood?

These then are the moral dilemmas in the current times. And it is here that we have Swami Vivekananda. Yes, we have him even today. Through Vivekananda, we can hear the voice of the Upanishads, the Gita, the Buddha, Shankara, Ramanuja, and Sri Ramakrishna, the

voice in which we have the best of the East. In it, conflicts, controversies, and confusions are resolved. This is the voice of empathy, of direction, and of leadership. Swamiji had himself suffered the miseries of life and during his wandering years, seen the sufferings of others. He had gone through intellectual, emotional, and spiritual turmoil which had brought him to the feet of Sri Ramakrishna. His study of the noblest thought—both oriental and occidental—was profound and analytical which had enabled him to synthesise and harmonise religion even while accepting its diverse strands. He was not only of India, but was a true universal man and belonged to the whole humanity. Above all, he was young, in his early thirties, when he burst upon the international scene.

Thus, Swamiji not only had sympathy but was endowed with empathy. If he said that he had a message for the West, he also brought a message for the East from the West. He was divine, yet he was human—the one to whom we, of any generation, can relate to. Himself a renunciate, he did not want his country to keep suffering from poverty, slavery, ignorance, and moral degradation. And, no, he did not want moral depravity, and therefore, asked us to always identify ourselves with our spiritual and moral roots and draw strength from there. He cried when he saw the plight of people in his country. But he did not only cry; did not only curse the fate or admonish them; he showed them the way out of the dilemma of his times and for the times to come. He left us a legacy of the Ramakrishna Mission. It is not on the shifting sands of time—a particular time—that he left his footprints. He cleared the confusion of current times, his voice echoes and reaches us in its relevance, authenticity, sense of proper direction, and splendour of authority: 'Instead of spending your energies in frothy talk, have



you found any way out, any practical solution, some help instead of condemnation, some sweet words to soothe their miseries, to bring them out of this living death? ... Yet that is not all. Have you got the will to surmount mountain-high obstructions? If the whole world stands against you sword in hand, would you still dare to do what you think is right?'<sup>12</sup> Then, quoting Bhatrihari, he says: 'Let the sages blame or let them praise; let the goddess of fortune come or let her go wherever she likes; let death come today, or let it come in hundreds of years; he indeed is the steady man who does not move one inch from the way of truth' (ibid.). And goes on, 'If you have these three things, each one of you will work miracles. You need not write in the newspapers, you need not go about lecturing; your very face will shine. If you live in a cave, your thoughts will permeate even through the rock walls, will go vibrating all over the world for hundreds of years, maybe, until they will fasten on to some brain and work out there' (226–7).

I wish to offer a few snippets from Swamiji's addresses or writings. They bear his views, give directions to our times, and are relevant to the times to come as well:

[*On Spirituality and Religion*] Our life-blood is spirituality. If it flows clear, if it flows strong and pure and vigorous, everything is right; political, social, any other material defects, even the poverty of the land, will all be cured if that blood is pure (3.288).

It is in love that religion exists and not in ceremony, in the pure and sincere love in the heart. Unless a man is pure in body and mind, his coming into a temple and worshipping Shiva is useless. The prayers of those that are pure in mind and body will be answered by Shiva, and those that are impure and yet try to teach religion to others will fail in the end (3.141).

[*On India*] Shall India die? Then from the world all spirituality will be extinct, all moral perfection will be extinct, all sweet - souled sympathy for religion will be extinct, all ideality will be extinct; and in its place will reign the duality of lust and luxury as the male and female deities, with money as its priest, fraud, force, and competition its ceremonies, and the human soul its sacrifice. Such a thing can never be (4.348).

I was asked by an English friend on the eve of my departure, 'Swami, how do you like now your motherland after four years' experience of the luxurious, glorious, powerful West?' I could only answer, 'India I loved before I came away. Now the very dust of India has become holy to me, the very air is now to me holy; it is now the holy land, the place of pilgrimage, the Tirtha' (3.309).

[*On Education*] The education which does not help the common mass of people to equip themselves for the struggle for life, which does not bring out strength of character, a spirit of philanthropy, and the courage of a lion—is it worth the name? Real education is that which enables one to stand on one's own legs. The education that you are receiving now in schools and colleges is only making you a race of dyspeptics. You are working like machines merely, and living a jelly-fish existence. (7.147–8).

[*Universal Religion*] Holiness, purity and charity are not the exclusive possessions of any church in the world, and that every system has produced men and women of the most exalted character. In the face of this evidence, if anybody dreams of the exclusive survival of his own religion and the destruction of the others, I pity him from the bottom of my heart (1.24).

[*On Poverty and Ignorance*] Do you feel? Do you feel that millions and millions of the descendants of gods and of sages have become next-door neighbors to brutes? Do you feel that millions are starving today, and millions have been starving for ages? Do you feel that

ignorance has come over the land as a dark cloud? Does it make you restless? Does it make you sleepless? Has it gone into your blood, coursing through your veins, becoming consonant with your heartbeats? Has it made you almost mad? Are you seized with that one idea of the misery of ruin, and have you forgotten all about your name, your fame, your wives, your children, your property, even your own bodies? Have you done that? That is the first step to become a patriot, the very first step (3.224–5).


[*On Women and their Empowerment*] And what to speak of Sita? You may exhaust the literature of the world that is past, and I may assure you that you will have to exhaust the literature of the world of the future, before finding another Sita. Sita is unique; that character was depicted once and for all. There may have been several Ramas, perhaps, but never more than one Sita! She is the very type of the true Indian woman (3.255).

Educate your women first and leave them to themselves; then they will tell you what reforms are necessary for them. In matters concerning them, who are you? (6.115).

That country and that nation which do not respect women have never become great, nor will ever be in future. The principal reason why your race has so much degenerated is that you have no respect for these living images of Shakti. ... There is no hope of rise for that family or country where there is no estimation of women, where they live in sadness. For this reason, they have to be raised first (7.215).

Aren't these words relevant to present times? Don't they express Swamiji's vision in today's context?

If only leaders in all spheres would listen to Vivekananda—who speaks to us even today in many inspiring voices, particularly through the monks of the Ramakrishna Order—they will appreciate their relevance and application through today's moral dilemmas. Swamiji

wanted a band of hundred monks. Today, thanks to his vision and practical action, he has hundreds of them spread across India and the rest of the world. If we initiate steps, work in specific positive directions under the guidance of these voices, I am sure, our quest for true religion and spirituality will be satiated; people will find reasons to smile; women shall feel empowered; and youth will get a positive direction. It may sound utopian in the midst of the present gloom, but Swamiji had firm faith in the great destiny of his country. Let us have faith and contribute our might to realise his vision, like 'the squirrel in the building of Rama's bridge' (3.213). 

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# Virchand Raghavji Gandhi

## —An Indian Spokesman and Jain Scholar

Dr Satish K Kapoor

(Continued from the previous issue)

AT THE CHICAGO PARLIAMENT, on 11 September 1893 Virchand described Jainism as a faith 'older than Buddhism, similar to it in its ethics, but different from it in its psychology'.<sup>7</sup> His paper presented on 25 September delineated the cosmology, canon, science, logic, epistemology, and moral codes of Jainism in a masterly way. He put forth two parallel but distinct views in the Jain tradition namely, *dravyarthik naya* which holds that the universe is without beginning and end, and *paryarthika naya* which holds that creation and destruction take place every moment. He divided the Jain canon into two parts—*shruti dharma*, revealed laws, and *charitra dharma*, moral laws. He referred to the nature of nine principles, six substances, six kinds of living beings, and four states of existence in the Jain philosophy.

He described the soul as the divine in all beings—the element which knows, thinks, and feels, but is different from matter which is also eternal. As long as the soul is subject to transmigration, it undergoes the process of evolution and involution. Moksha, the final liberation, is achieved when the soul regains its purest form by relieving itself of the burden of karma and severing all connection with matter. The realised ones look upon all living beings as themselves. He explained the Jain belief in eight types of karma—law of cause and effect—and in the theory of reincarnation, widely supported by philosophers, theologians, and prophets, as it provides the *raison d'être* for

injustice and misery in the world. He asserted that the Jain prophets could reveal the minutest divisions of living beings with their inner eye and envision 'how many organs of sense the minutest animalcule has' (734), much before the discovery of the microscope. He informed the audience that there were works on biology, zoology, botany, anatomy, and physiology in the Jain tradition, written centuries before the birth of modern sciences.

The Jains were not atheists or agnostics. Although a first cause or a creator-deity is absent in Jain cosmology, the Tirthankaras recognise the essence of all substances, 'conscious as well as unconscious, which becomes an eternal cause of all modifications and is termed God' (ibid.). Jainism teaches that 'knowledge and religious observances' (736) are the means to obtain the highest happiness. In conclusion, he spoke of the five great vows: 'Not to kill, i.e., to protect all life. Not to lie. Not to take that which is not given. To abstain from sexual intercourse. To renounce all interest in worldly things, especially to call nothing one's own' (ibid.). These vows, similar to the five restraints of the *Yoga Sutra* of Patanjali, are regarded as means of attaining the supreme spiritual state.

In his final address on 27 September, Virchand thanked the organisers of the Parliament for their hospitality, kindness, 'liberal spirit and patience' (854) with which they heard the delegates from the Orient. However, in view of occasional notes of disharmony, Christian claims to superiority over

other religions, and some direct attacks on Hinduism and Buddhism, he observed: 'If you will only permit a heathen to deliver his message of peace and love I shall only ask you to look at the multifarious ideas presented to you in a liberal spirit, and not with superstition and bigotry, as the seven blind men did in the elephant story' (853). He established that truth has various dimensions; religions are divided by ignorance and bigotry, and the good in all faiths needs to be recognised.

### Jain Contribution

After the Parliament, Virchand Raghavji Gandhi went on lecture tours in different parts of America and England on invitation, visiting India in between. His various discourses and writings explain the contribution of Jainism to various disciplines like philosophy, religion, literature, and the arts.

The Jain contribution to the domain of metaphysics includes its concept of the self-existent and timeless Reality; its *bheda-abheda* doctrine which recognises both different, *bheda*, and identical, *abheda*, perspectives, its nine categories namely, *jiva*, living being or soul; *ajiva*, non-living being; *punya*, good deeds; *papa*, evil deeds; *ashrava*, influx of karma; *bandha*, bondage of karma; *samvara*, stoppage of inflow of karma; *nirjara*, eradication of karmic matter; and *moksha*, salvation; its six-fold division of *dravyas*, substances, namely *jiva*, soul, *pudgala*, matter, *dharma*, principle of motion, *adharma*, principle of rest, *akasha*, space—together called *panchastikaya*—and *kala*, time; its fourfold division of souls—*devas*, gods, *jivas*, living beings, *tiryaks*, lower animals and the vegetable kingdom, and *narakas*, lower regions—all subject to the law of karma, and so on.

Jainism states that an atom is indivisible and indestructible and has colour, flavour, and taste; that the aggregate of atoms in various modes and combinations changes the quality and taxonomy of objects, and comes closer to the scientific view.

The Jain theory of five kinds of knowledge namely, *mati*, ordinary cognition, *shruti*, testimony, *avadhi*, inner perception, *manahparyaya*, capability to read the mind of others, and *kevala* or *pratyaksha jnana*, perfect or direct knowledge, adds a new dimension to epistemology. The seven modes of predication, *saptabhangi*, also called seven *nayas* or standpoints are—*syad asti*, perhaps is, *syad nasti*, perhaps is not, *syad asti-nasti*, perhaps is and is not, *syad avaktavya*, perhaps is inexpressible, *syad asti avaktavya*, perhaps is and is inexpressible, *syad nasti avaktavya*, perhaps is not and is inexpressible, *syad asti nasti avaktavya*, perhaps is, is not, and is inexpressible.

The Jain view of non-violence as the highest ideal of life is a great contribution to ethics. Its concept of *moksha* as a state of freedom which renders infinite joy, infinite freedom, and infinite bliss adds to the theology of salvation. The rejection of dogma in Jainism and the acceptance of different points of view are the salient features of Jain ethos.

Jain art as seen through its iconography, sculptures, paintings, stupas—hemispherical structures, decorated manuscripts, mystic diagrams, and temples, is aesthetic, meaningful, majestic, and magnificent. Jains have produced a vast literature on philosophy, logic, history, comparative religion, grammar, prosody, mathematics, lexicography, astronomy, art, and other subjects in Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and Prakrit.

### Critique of Christianity

At the Parliament, Christianity was presented by some as the only true and universal religion, 'the only complete and God-given revelation' (683). The code of righteousness revealed by God to Moses, called the Ten Commandments, was described as superior to the ethical precepts of the Orientals and 'far in advance of all statements which the world had ever had' (687). It was argued that the idea of the unity of God and the



brotherhood of man as suggested in Paul's great speech on Mars Hill was not found in 'the Hindu Buddhistic Bible' (689). Rev. Joseph Cook of Boston stated on 14 September that he regarded all faiths except Christianity as 'a Torso'. Except Christianity 'there is no religion known under heaven, or among men, that effectively provides for the soul this joyful deliverance from the love of sin and the guilt of it', he said (220-1). As regards the antiquity of Christianity, Pentecost pointed out that it does not date from the birth of Christ. 'Christ crucified 2000 years ago was only the culmination in time, and to our sense, of a revelation already ages old' (684). Besides, no ideal character 'ever satisfied the demands of the moral consciousness of the ancient world' as did Jesus Christ (686).

Like many Oriental delegates to the Parliament, such as Kinza Riuge M Hirai from Japan, Swami Vivekananda, Hewavitarn Dharmapala, and others, Virchand Raghavji Gandhi was convinced that the Christian attitude towards other religions based on the interpretation of Saint Justin Martyr (c. 100-165 CE), Saint Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-215 CE), Tertullian (c. 160-220 CE), Tatian (c. 120-180 CE), and others, was that of hostility, condemnation, and intolerance. Justin Martyr, for example, interpreted non-Christian religions as the work of demons and evil spirits, and dubbed them all as 'crude superstitions, demonic counterfeits and caricatures of the true religion'.<sup>8</sup>

Both in America and Europe, Virchand pointed out the Christian bias against other faiths, based as it was on raw, tainted information from dubious quarters. He disapproved of proselytism rooted in such theological assumptions as: all-non-Christians were going to hell; there was no way to salvation except through Jesus Christ who is the central and culminating point of God's salvific plan for mankind; and that Christianity is the fulfilment of all religions. He rejected the view that some people

are the chosen of god<sup>9</sup> while others are pagan; that if Jesus Christ is true, all other prophets must be false. Without denying the purity of the character of Jesus Christ and the nobility of his ethical teachings he observed that he had been preceded by many spiritual masters like him: 'I have to say that no Christian minister can point to a single moral truth or ethical statement in his new testament of Jesus the Christ that I cannot duplicate a thousand times with even greater emphases from the sacred books and teachings of our religion antedating as they do the Christian era by thousands upon thousands of years'.<sup>10</sup>

In one of his historic lectures, 'Have Christian Missions to India been successful?' delivered at the Nineteenth Century Club in America, Virchand presented a critique of Christianity and missionary methods (88-113). He argued that Christianity does not have fixed doctrines as it has grown through the ages—from the times of Christ to that of the Fathers of the Church to that of the Middle Ages, to the Age of Reformation down to the present times. Christianity has not come 'direct through Christ' but through 'the layers of superstition and bigotry, of intolerance and persecution, of damnation and eternal hell-fire.' It has thus lost the standard of apostolic days (90-1,101). The fact that Christianity has borrowed its cosmogony, festivals, liturgies, and sacred paraphernalia from previous or older religious traditions shows that it does not have a 'divine origin' (92). Its doctrines of Original Sin and of vicarious atonement are not convincing (101,110). The gullible are made to believe theological half-truths and miracles, like the immaculate conception of Mary and the resurrection of Jesus after the crucifixion. The Church has been offering inducements to convert the poor with foreign money. It has used education and social work as means of proselytisation, something 'repulsive to our conscience'

(109). Instead of improving moral standards, or raising the position of women and the masses, Christianity has introduced social evils with its western lifestyle and values, which overemphasize the gratification of the senses, its ideas of marriage and of social relations (101). He noted that Christians being non-vegetarians and wine-drinkers seem to the Hindus to represent a religion bereft of humanitarian or spiritual ideals (105).

He wondered how the 'dogmatic aggressiveness' (110) of Christian preachers elevate the spiritual state of a nation and argued that the missionaries were so trained as to detest other religions. They preached an insular creed, and spread 'a false theology', 'not only false but positively injurious to the best interests of mankind' (90). They were ignorant about Indian history, culture, and philosophy, and saw nothing positive in non-Christian traditions (95). They were systematically spreading false information about other faiths to erode their credibility. Like Swami Vivekananda, he goaded the Christian missionaries to put their theology into action—to live a virtuous life like that of Jesus Christ, and not indulge in calumny, hypocrisy, drinking, and other vices. He felt that dogmatic Christianity cannot take root in India.

### ***Defender of Hinduism and Indian Culture***

Virchand saw historical and cultural affinity between Hinduism and Jainism since both have emerged from the same soil. At the Chicago Parliament he had the honour to read Manilal N Dwivedi's detailed essay on Hinduism, in his absence. He defended the Hindu tradition against missionary attacks as can be seen from his response to George T Pentecost's vitriolic observations on 24 September.<sup>11</sup>

Pentecost had spoken derisively about the Hindu deities by observing that to compare 'the peerless Christ' 'to any of the gods worshipped by the Hindus' is to mock both them and him (685).

He had lampooned the traditional Hindu history by saying that peculiarly 'destitute of the historical sense, millions of years are as easily managed by the Orientals as decades are with us' (683). He had dubbed the claim about the eternity of the Vedas and the antiquity of Puranic heroes antedating 'all other faiths' as irrational (683–4). Above all, he had cast aspersions 'upon the chastity of women who serve in the temples of India' (701).

He explained why Christian missionaries painted a negative image of India: 'They go to India to convert the heathens in a mass, but when they find their dreams melting away, as dreams always do, they return to pass a whole life in abusing the Hindu' (ibid.). He argued that the 'present abuses' in Hinduism, were not from religion, but in spite of it, as in every other country. Hindu society had been so virtuous in the past that a Greek historian remarked: 'No Hindu was ever known to tell an untruth, no Hindu women ever known to be unchaste.' He gave the example of emperor Akbar (1542–1605) who showed the utmost respect to the Bible when a ship of Christian traders was captured with the copies of their holy book, unlike the Portuguese Christians who had defiled the *Koran* in a similar situation (ibid.). Virchand also referred to ancient and medieval travellers and scholars like Hieun Tsang (602–664 CE), Marco Polo (1254–1324 CE), and Mohammad al-Idrisi (1099–1161), who showered rich encomiums on the Hindus for their high character, truthfulness, and honesty.<sup>12</sup> As regards the superstitious nature of Hindus, he said, 'These holy men talk of the Hindu superstitions. They had better examine their own religion. A religion whose beginning is in blood, whose salvation is in blood, whose purity is in innocent blood, whose hope of saintship is in a dream of a sea of blood, whose revivals are brought about by preaching and a vision of the sea of blood afresh, would do better by talking less of the superstitions of other

nations' (108). It appears that the caustic observations of Rev. T E Slater of the London Missionary Society, Bangalore, made in his paper, read at the Chicago Parliament by Frank M Bristol, were lurking in the mind of Virchand when he uttered these words. The paper stated inter alia that no 'literature, not even the Jewish, contains so many words relating to sacrifice as Sanskrit. The land has been saturated with blood.'<sup>13</sup>

The concept of India as a unique, hoary civilisation and vibrant culture, with multi-ethnic, multi-racial, multi-religious, and multilingual traits, finds articulation in the discourses and writings of Virchand Gandhi. To him India was not just a geographical entity but the land of gods and holy men. He regarded the quintessential Indian values as timeless and eternal and saw the different schools of Indian philosophy as flowers of various hues, all emitting fragrance. He regretted that while India was 'the mother of religions' and 'the cradle of civilization' it was dubbed as the land of heathens, 'both materially and spiritually' in Christendom due to ignorance.<sup>14</sup> On the testimony of Greek writers like Strabo, Pliny, Arrian, and Megasthenese he argued that India had become a familiar topic with Westerners before the birth of Jesus. He quoted from the writings of scholars like Max Müller (1823–1900), Sir Thomas Munro (1761–1827), H H Wilson (1786–1860), and others to show that India had a glorious past.

Hinduism to him was not a religion in the Western sense of the term but a way to achieve all-round perfection. He spoke of Hinduism's antiquity and its superiority to European knowledge in many spheres of activity. He rejected the view that Hindus have no history 'worth considering' prior to the Muslim invasion of India. Historical events were transmitted 'with particularity and exactness from generation to generation, from century to century' (254–5). Like Swami Vivekananda, he provided the *raison d'être* of caste, image worship,


rites of marriage, and of religious symbols like Om, *swastika*, forehead-marks, *chakras*—wheels or lotuses—in the subtle body, and so on. He described Sanskrit—*deva-vani*—'language of the gods' as 'the oldest language in the sisterhood of languages' (255), and as essential for an understanding of Indian history, religion, and culture, a fact vouchsafed by Western philologists. Yet he was not a revivalist in the narrow sense of the term. He disagreed with Abbe du Bois's description of Hinduism as a pagan religion and argued that modern science has come to accept the value of some ancient rites and ceremonies. Contrary to the Western belief that Hindu women were 'abject slaves' of their husbands, and enjoyed a lower status in society, he observed that the wife in India is regarded as the queen of the household and never kept in seclusion or subjection, denied education or excluded from holding a high position in society (261–3). He quoted Sir Thomas Munro who said that 'the Hindus are not inferior to the nations of Europe, and if civilization is to become an object of trade between England and India, I am convinced that England will gain by the import cargo' (96).

## Conclusion

Virchand Raghavji Gandhi had a short but eventful life marked by prominent social, religious, and legal activities, for which he was honoured by Jains as well as non-Jains, both in India and abroad. The triumph of his mission in the West raised the image of India and restored the confidence of the Jain community in its ethos. He brought about an inner resurgence in Jainism by upholding its precepts against all odds, thereby saving its soul from the growing impact of the West. He was successful in stimulating interest in Jainism both as faith and as a way of life, which is evident from the fact that Herbert Warren and Mrs Howard adopted the culture of the Jain community. While the former took notes of his lectures and expatiated on the

Jain faith, the latter served as Secretary of the Society for the Education of Women of India, founded by him. He showed that Jainism can provide answers to the ultimate existential questions, and help one take a quantum jump from ignorance to supreme knowledge, from conflict to peace. His understanding of Buddhism, Indian mysticism—which he regarded as synonymous with Patanjali yoga—the six systems of Indian philosophy, and comparative religion, was superb, and for this reason, he was invited to a number of religious, spiritual, and philosophical societies in important American cities like Chicago, New York, Boston, and Washington DC. He also made a mark in England by his insightful talks and his success in winning an appeal. His lectures on concentration, meditation, hypnotism, dietetics, the art and science of breathing, and the occult, generated much interest, and continue to be meaningful.<sup>15</sup> He taught how one can strengthen will, nullify negative propensities, expand consciousness, and awaken inner powers. His views on spirituality are well suited to this age of scientific enquiry and rationalistic criticism.

As a crusader for the Jain causes he succeeded in obtaining tax exemption in 1886 for pilgrims to the sacred Mount Shatrunjaya in Gujarat, through a compromise with the ruler of Palitana, by using the good offices of Lord Reay, governor of Bombay. He filed a case for the closure of the tallow factory of Boddam on Sammed-Shikhar also called Shikharji, the venerable peak of Jains in Jharkhand, and won it after great effort. He was a great patriot, and his concern for the masses grew out of his sense of identity with humanity. While in the US he could raise forty thousand rupees for the famine stricken people of India and arrange to send a steamer full of grains in 1896. He remained a pure vegetarian throughout his life, sometimes surviving on raw or boiled vegetables in the cold climate of America and Europe,<sup>16</sup> thus becoming

a living legend for the supporters of vegetarianism in his time. Like Swami Vivekananda, he wanted a synthesis of tradition and modernity, of science and spirituality, so that mankind could have peace as well as prosperity. He left his mortal coil on 7 August 1901 in Mumbai. 

### Notes and References

7. *Neely's History of the Parliament of Religions and Religious Congresses at the World's Columbian Exposition*, ed. Walter R Houghton (Chicago and New York: F Tennyson Neely, 1894), 62.
8. M V Cyriac, *Meeting of Religions, A Reappraisal of the Christian Vision* (Madras: Dialogue Series, 1982), 138–9.
9. See Deuteronomy 7:6.
10. *The Jain Philosophy, Speeches and Writings of Virchand R Gandhi*, ed. Kumarpal Desai (Mumbai: World Jain Confederation, 2009), 111–2.
11. See *Neely's History of the Parliament of Religions*, 682–90.
12. *The Jain Philosophy*, 94–5.
13. *Neely's History of the Parliament of Religions*, 166.
14. *The Jain Philosophy*, 88–9; See also, *The Unknown Life of Jesus Christ*, trans. Virchand R Gandhi (Mumbai: World Jain Confederation, 2009), 50. This book was translated by Virchand Gandhi from the original French of an ancient manuscript discovered in a Buddhist monastery in Tibet by Nicolas Notovitch. Virchand Gandhi also edited this book with an introduction and illustrations and it was revised by G L Christie of the University of Paris and edited by Kumarpal Desai.
15. See Virchand Gandhi, *The Yoga Philosophy*, ed. Kumarpal Desai (Mumbai: World Jain Confederation, 2009).
16. Swami Vivekananda wrote to Diwanji in November 1894: 'Now here is Virchand Gandhi, the Jain, whom you well knew in Bombay. This man never takes anything but pure vegetables even in this terribly cold climate, and tooth and nail tries to defend his countrymen and religion. The people of this country like him very well, but what are they doing who sent him over? They are trying to outcast him.' *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1–8, 1989; 9, 1997), 8.328–9.



# Ways of Knowing Mantras

Damon F Lynch

(Continued from the previous issue)

## Contrasting Notions of Validity

THE TWO APPROACHES DO NOT AGREE on what a mantra is or why it should be used. For Yelle, mantras are literally like spells or magic. For Easwaran and Aurobindo, there is nothing magical about them. Instead, they are an intensely practical means to realise a mystical state of consciousness that they themselves have experienced and are exponents of. For Yelle, Hindu religious scriptures are to be intellectually analysed, but it is not necessary to put into practice their teachings in order to understand their claims. For Easwaran and Aurobindo, the scriptures are radiant sources of light on the spiritual aspirant's journey to both discover and uncover the divine within themselves and the world around them. Mantras and theories about them can be truly understood only after they have brought about a profound change in consciousness. Until that time, mantras can bring about immense practical benefit, but they cannot be fully understood. Yelle dismisses the possibility that using a mantra can materialise worldly change, calling it an illusion. Easwaran and Aurobindo vigorously disagree. For them, the point of the mantra and associated spiritual disciplines is transformative change.<sup>30</sup>

All this is immediately obvious. Yet the point is not merely that the two approaches arrive at different conclusions. Following Ratcliffe, what is most significant in the context of this paper is the nature of the *inquiry systems* inherent in the two approaches and what they take to be

their *guarantors of validity*. Underlying each approach is a system containing a set of assumptions that firmly guides their inquiry. As is now widely understood, the paradigm in which knowledge is generated determines, 'how the problem will be defined, which model(s) of inquiry will

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**Mantras and theories about the divine within and the world around can be truly understood only after they have brought about a profound change in consciousness.**

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be considered to be relevant to the problem as defined, where one shall look (and, by implication, where one shall *not* look) for evidence—and even what one shall consider to be constitutive of evidence.<sup>31</sup>

Ratcliffe illustrates why the two approaches reach conclusions which are diametrically opposed when he argues:

*knowledge is a function of the inquiry system used to formulate the problem and to generate information concerning its nature.* The informational outcome of any given inquiry into a problem thus will vary with the way the problem is conceptualized. Therefore, different systems of inquiry will produce radically different conceptualizations of the same problem and, as a consequence, radically different information and radically different conclusions. (151)

In what follows, I draw upon Ratcliffe's descriptions of inquiry systems and the guarantors of validity inherent in them. Yelle uses an

inquiry system that is a mixture of deductive and inductive systems. Yelle presents a formal, structural model of tantric mantras focusing on their poetic elements. His model is presumed to rest on an empirical observation of mantras as found in Tantric texts and to an exceedingly lesser extent in the actual practice of tantric devotees.<sup>32</sup> He assumes these observations ‘can be identified and agreed upon by all rational observers’ (153). He strives to apply rigorous, rational, deductive, and inductive logic to the problem of the meaning of mantras, aiming for logical consistency within his model and with the formal propositions found within anthropological linguistics. However, based on his inductive reasoning, he modifies these propositions where appropriate. An example of this is his critique of Austin’s notion of performativity. Extremely significant in Yelle’s approach is ‘sufficiently widespread agreement among the professional scientific community, i.e., consensus among “experts”’ (154) as to the correctness of his approach. These experts in his case include most especially his dissertation committee, Wendy Doniger, Sheldon Pollock, and Michael Silverstein, but it also consists of academic peers he holds in esteem. They do not include mystics or even those who study mysticism and spiritual practices from a scientific perspective.

For Easwaran and Aurobindo, the guarantor of validity for the mantra is found in its use. Their inquiry system is the actual experiential practice of spiritual disciplines as described through the centuries and refined for the present. In this inquiry system, the practice of a mantra is rational in the sense that it has demonstrable, repeatable, and beneficial effects on the ins and outs of daily life. That is, the effects of the mantra can be rationally reflected on and ascertained, obviously including the use of reason. But the method used to personally experience the insights derived

from mantra practice—to actually bring them about in the course of one’s own life—is not rational in the sense of substantially deriving from the use of the intellect. Intellectual understanding of the actual practice of a mantra is helpful but not essential—not being able to define a mantra does not affect its use, for instance. Instead, the method itself is what scholars typically gloss as non-rational, extra-rational, or irrational.

But what does this really mean? What more can be said to assert that the practice of a mantra is non-rational? In brief, the answer is that it involves a change in consciousness, which can in a limited sense be approximately described but has to be experienced to be in any satisfactory way properly understood; the insights derived from this change of consciousness are of a different order to those of ordinary waking consciousness. However this answer must be analysed in greater detail, given that it goes against the grain of contemporary academic norms. To do so, I draw upon at some length both Easwaran and Aurobindo’s explanations.<sup>33</sup> Gonda writes that the Vedic religions and literature of which the mantra is a part are ‘considered not products of discursive thought, human wisdom or poetic phantasy, but flash-lights of the eternal truth, seen by those eminent men who have come into a supersensuous contact with the Unseen.’<sup>34</sup> Easwaran writes that the ‘fervent desire to know is the motivation behind all science.’<sup>35</sup> The authors of the Upanishads took this intense desire to know and

focused on the medium of knowing: the mind. ... The sages of the Upanishads show a unique preoccupation with states of consciousness. ... Since consciousness is the field of all human activity, outward as well as inner—experience, action, imagination, knowledge, love—a science of consciousness holds out the promise of central principles that unify all of life. ‘By knowing one piece of gold,’ the Upanishads observed, ‘all things made out of gold are known:

they differ only in name and form, while the stuff of which all are made is gold.' And they asked, 'What is that one by knowing which we can know the nature of everything else?' They found the answer in consciousness. Its study was called *brahma-vidya*, which means both 'the supreme science' and 'the science of the Supreme'. ... Brahmagvidya is not concerned with the insights that come from concentrating on a particular part of life; it is concerned with how concentration yields insight at all (ibid.).

Recall that fundamental to Yelle's project is a conception of mantras as having an inherent poetic form. This would undoubtedly be of no surprise to Aurobindo. For him, this poetic form is essential. He concurs with Easwaran that spiritual truths are experienced in changes of consciousness. His explanation of the role of intellect and speech in this is powerful and I believe truly vital. He writes that truths about ultimate reality are in themselves

seized directly, not by intellectual understanding but by a spiritual intuition, a spiritual experience in the very substance of our consciousness; but they can also be caught at in conception by a large and plastic idea and can be expressed in some sort by a plastic speech which does not insist too much on rigid definition or limit the wideness and subtlety of the idea. *In order to express this experience or this idea with any nearness a language has to be created which is at once intuitively metaphysical and revealingly poetic, admitting significant and living images as the vehicle of a close, suggestive and vivid indication*—a language such as we find hammered out into a subtle and pregnant massiveness in the Veda and the Upanishads. In the ordinary tongue of metaphysical thought we have to be content with a distant indication, an approximation by abstractions, which may still be of some service to our intellect, for it is this kind of speech which suits our method of logical and rational understanding; but if it is to be of real service, the intellect must consent

to pass out of the bounds of a finite logic and accustom itself to the logic of the Infinite. On this condition alone, by this way of seeing and thinking, it ceases to be paradoxical or futile to speak of the ineffable: but if we insist on applying a finite logic to the Infinite, the omnipresent Reality will escape us and we shall grasp instead an abstract shadow, a dead form petrified into speech or a hard incisive graph which speaks of the Reality but does not express it. *Our way of knowing must be appropriate to that which is to be known; otherwise we achieve only a distant speculation, a figure of knowledge and not veritable knowledge.*<sup>36</sup>

From Easwaran and Aurobindo's perspective, the system of inquiry inherent in Yelle's approach is simply inappropriate because it is not suited to the problem of properly understanding mantras. There is a mismatch between the method and the problem. As Ratcliffe states with respect to the social sciences generally, 'What commonly happens is that social scientists, in order to obtain results accepted as valid by the scientific community at large, will apply methods suited

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**Easwaran's and Aurobindo's inquiry system is the actual experiential practice of spiritual disciplines as described through the centuries and refined for the present.**

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to well-structured problems to the ill-structured problems with which social scientists inevitably deal.<sup>37</sup> He goes on to state that the inevitable outcome is that, 'the problem under consideration will be forced into a definition (and therefore a structure) compatible with the nature of the method, instead of allowing the structure of the problem to determine which system of inquiry and associated methods are the most relevant and useful' (ibid.).

This is precisely the problem with Yelle's approach. Although his approach is legitimate by

the standards of contemporary academic norms, the point is that it arises from it *by convention*. Yelle applies his research method not because it is not derived from the problem at hand, but because it is customary to do so. Yelle has inadvertently applied a method that necessarily generates misleading and erroneous conclusions.

An inevitable challenge at this point is that the states of consciousness that Easwaran and Aurobindo discuss are rarely experienced. Just as few joggers become renowned Olympic cham-

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**The mode of consciousness experienced by a person when they experience ultimate reality is vastly different to when they think of ultimate reality using their intellect.**

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pion runners, few spiritual aspirants—not to mention academics—actually become mystics. Putting aside the notion that mantra is of practical benefit to non-mystics, what is the guarantor of validity for the non-mystic? Physician, neuroscientist, and mantra-user Daniel H Lowenstein writes, ‘Ultimately, one must rely on experience to measure the success of any activity.’<sup>38</sup> Again, its validity is found in daily practice. Yet as someone who cannot help but see the world from a biological perspective, Lowenstein analyses mantras using the skills he has learned in his practice as a neuroscientist and physician. He writes:

Does the mantram also work on deeper levels of consciousness? In my own experience, I have seen that it does. After I had repeated the mantram consciously over a period of time, I found the words arising naturally when I faced a situation of fear or distress. In fact, now I sometimes become aware of the mantram repeating itself *before* I actually realize that I am in a predicament. This type of brain learning, where an act frequently repeated becomes an unconscious activity, is related to the recruitment of more and more neurons in brain regions that

are activated by unconscious as well as conscious activity (7–8).

He later asks, referring to Easwaran’s teaching that a mantra be chosen that has a mystic’s stamp of approval, ‘Why does there seem to be a need for a mantram that has spiritual roots? Are there even deeper levels of consciousness that the mantram can reach? Are there any negatives to relying on a mantram? Neuroscience currently lacks answers for these questions, and I suspect this will be the case for a very long time, if not forever’ (8).

Lowenstein is pointing to the possibility that scientific and spiritual truths may ultimately be incommensurable, at least from the perspective of neuroscience. This demonstrates that the guarantor of validity for the non-mystic includes faith. When seeking the divine, the spiritual aspirant must have faith that they are *doing the right thing* in using a mantra. The same can be said for advocates of rationalist inquiry like Yelle. They too have faith, but their faith is in the primacy of reason over all other forms of knowing.

### **Peirce: Signs and Reality**

In a way parallel to the apparent incommensurability of neuroscience and spiritual practice, it may seem that the approach advocated by Yelle is likewise forever incommensurable with that of Easwaran and Aurobindo. Yet that is not necessarily true. The system of signs developed by Charles S Peirce (1839–1914) is significant in Yelle’s intellectual work, as it is in Silverstein. Yelle ignores the religious aspects of Peirce’s work. However there is nothing intrinsically wrong in taking Yelle’s insights into the poetic structure of tantric mantras and combining them with a fuller embrace of Peirce’s ideas.<sup>39</sup>

One possible interpretation of Peirce is that it is compatible with a mystical view of ultimate



reality, insofar as Peirce posits a limit to his logic of signs. He asserts that while ‘we think only in signs’,<sup>40</sup> he also states that ‘the modes of thought of a God, who should possess an intuitive omniscience superseding reason, are put out of the question’ (5).

Peirce’s relationship with religion defies simplistic analysis, and is obviously beyond the scope of this paper. Yet in passing we can note that Brent argues that ‘mystical experience’ greatly influenced the development of Peirce’s ‘doctrine of the semiotic, of which his logic of science is a part.’<sup>41</sup> Trammel writes: ‘Peirce identified the mystic’s belief in “private inspiration from on high” as a “form of the method of tenacity”.’<sup>42</sup>

Peirce might thus agree that from a mystic’s perspective, his logic of signs applies when a person experiences reality using common modes of consciousness. When a person has a wholly unmediated experience of reality, transcending the intellect, and ultimately going beyond consciousness as it is normally understood and experienced, then his logic of signs does not apply. As the *Katha Upanishad* states, ‘from the world of words to the world of thoughts, then beyond thoughts to wisdom in the Self’.<sup>43</sup> The mode of consciousness experienced by a person when they *experience* ultimate reality is vastly different from when they *think* of ultimate reality using their intellect, or *communicate* this thought to others. This idea is expressed by Aurobindo when he writes that human speech ‘raises up only the presentation

of a presentation, the mental figure of an object which is itself only a figure of the sole Reality, Brahman. It has indeed a power of new creation, but even that power only extends to the creation of new mental images, that is to say of adaptive formations based upon previous mental images. Such a limited power gives no idea of the original creative puissance which the old thinkers attributed to the divine Word.’<sup>44</sup>

Aurobindo is stating that speech is a mental figure, a sign, of what has become cognised in



the mind—a thought of the divine, which is itself a mental image, a sign; the thought signs created by speech leads to the creation of new signs. This is remarkably consistent with Peirce in two senses. First, as we saw above, Peirce claims we think only in signs and that this type of thought process does not apply to the divine. Second, integral to Peirce’s notion of the sign is that one sign leads to another. Peirce writes that<sup>45</sup> a sign ‘addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which it creates I call the *interpretant* of the first sign. The sign stands for something, its *object*. It stands for that object, not in all respects, but in reference to a sort of idea,

which I have sometimes called the *ground* of the representamen.<sup>46</sup>

Staal describes this well when he writes:<sup>47</sup>

the mystical state is a state of awareness that can be reached or produced with the aid of mantras, a state of consciousness that is 'beyond language' or 'ineffable'. Mantras give access to this ineffable state. To say with Renou, Padoux, and Wheelock that mantras are beyond the boundary of language, at the highest level of speech 'situated beyond language and eventually right to the zone of language,' or to say that mantras 'point backwards to the source of language, which is the source of all creation itself' is not merely a matter of phenomenological, religious, or spiritual metaphor, or using an apt expression for the right congregation.<sup>48</sup>

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**The study of mantras shows that modern notions of scientific inquiry have limits when they seek to explain what mantras are and how they are used.**

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### Conclusion

The study of mantras shows that the modern notions of scientific inquiry have limits when they seek to explain what mantras are and how they are used. This raises the inevitable question as to whether it is possible to overcome these limits and by corollary what ought to be the proper way of knowing mantras. I have argued that mantra exponents like Easwaran and Aurobindo have demonstrated a satisfactory system of inquiry. This system of inquiry deserves legitimate recognition within the academia. Anthropology is well positioned to contribute to this project, given that its fundamental question is to ask what we humans are and how we ought to be understood.

One reason Peirce is so interesting is because he grappled in deep ways with the problems associated with ways of knowing. According

to Trammel, for Peirce the 'practical man, the theologian, and the teacher are all committed in one way or another to the status quo of belief; whereas the theoretical man, the scientific inquirer, the learner, is committed to diminishing "the unsatisfactoriness of his present condition of knowledge."' <sup>49</sup>

This leads to an irony implicit in my overall argument. Paradoxically, when academics apply modern scientific research methods to the study of mantras without being cognisant of the limitations inherent in them, they cannot be said to undertake a genuine scientific inquiry motivated by a burning desire to overcome the unsatisfactoriness of knowledge. Instead, what occurs is a reaffirmation of the status quo of popular contemporary research methodologies. In this sense, the researcher is like the kind of theologian Peirce refers to. Perhaps this more than anything explains why a distinguished scholar such as Yelle—who is unquestionably gifted with superb analytical abilities—can apparently feel no need to understand in any kind of rigorous way what actually happens when a mantra becomes established in consciousness. This is especially ironic given that using a mantra is in the words of Bormann, et al, 'portable, convenient, easy to implement, and inexpensive'.<sup>50</sup>

Hymes writes with sage-like clarity that, 'Ultimately, the functions served in speech must be derived directly from the purposes and needs of human persons engaged in social action, and are what they are. ... The formal analysis of speaking is a means to the understanding of human purposes and needs, and their satisfaction; it is an indispensable means, but only a means, and not that understanding itself.'<sup>51</sup>

The mantra meets human needs. Formal analysis of them ought not to be confused with the understanding their performance generates. ❧<sup>pb</sup>

## Notes and References

30. Intriguingly, there has been a veritable flowering of recent scientific work demonstrating that meditation practices bring about material changes in the brain. This shows that even in a strict material sense, Yelle is simply wrong when he says that mantras cannot bring about worldly change. These changes in the brain include short and long-term neural changes and increased cortical thickness. See A Lutz, L L Greischar, N B Rawlings, M Ricard, and R J Davidson, 'Long-term meditators self-induce high-amplitude gamma synchrony during mental practice', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 101/46 (November 2004), 16369–73; A Lutz, H A Slagter, J D Dunne, and R J Davidson, 'Attention regulation and monitoring in meditation', *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 12/4 (April 2008), 163–9; and S W Lazar, et al, 'Meditation experience is associated with increased cortical thickness', *Neuroreport*, 16/17 (November 2005), 1893–7.
31. J W Ratcliffe, 'Notions of Validity in Qualitative Research Methodology', *Science Communication*, 5/2 (December 1983), 148. Emphasis in the original.
32. If Yelle did any fieldwork as a participant observer, the results of it are not so far as I can tell present anywhere in his text.
33. At this point I must beg the reader's forgiveness for the length of these citations. The simple fact is I cannot possibly do justice to their insights with a short summary.
34. J Gonda, 'The Indian Mantra', *Oriens*, 16 (December 1963), 247.
35. E Easwaran and M N Nagler, *The Upanishads* (Tomales: Nilgiri Press, 2007), 24.
36. *The Complete Works Of Sri Aurobindo*, 37 vols (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1997), 22.337–8.
37. 'Notions of Validity in Qualitative Research Methodology', 161.
38. E Easwaran, *The Mantram Handbook: A Practical Guide to Choosing Your Mantram and Calming Your Mind* (Tomales: The Blue Mountain Center of Meditation, 2009), 8.
39. This could be also be relevant to Yelle's work given he embraces aspects of Nietzsche's understanding of language. There are arguably echoes of mystical insights in Nietzsche's understandings.
40. C S Peirce, *Semiotics: An Introductory Anthology*, ed. Robert E Innis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 19.
41. J Brent, 'Pursuing Peirce', *Synthese*, 106/3, (March 1996), 301.
42. R L Trammel, 'Religion, Instinct and Reason in the Thought of Charles S. Peirce', *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, 8/1, (Winter 1972), 16.
43. *The Upanishads*, 82.
44. *The Complete Works Of Sri Aurobindo*, 18.30.
45. *Semiotics: An Introductory Anthology*, 5.
46. An interesting research question is that of any further parallels between Aurobindo and Peirce's understanding of signs. Aurobindo discusses conventional symbols, life-symbols, inherently appropriate symbols, and mental symbols. He writes: 'A symbol, as I understand it, is the form on one plane that represents a truth of another. For instance, a flag is the symbol of a nation. But generally all forms are symbols. This body of ours is a symbol of our real being and everything is a symbol of some higher reality.' (*The Complete Works Of Sri Aurobindo*, 30.137).
47. F Staal, *Understanding Mantras*, ed. Harvey P Alper (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1991), 80.
48. Staal immediately argues that these ideas support his theory that mantras precede language in the process of human evolution. Yelle argues that Staal is mistaken, because the poetic form is language par excellence. See R A Yelle, *Explaining Mantras: Ritual, Rhetoric, and the Dream of a Natural Language in Hindu Tantra* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 21.
49. 'Religion, Instinct and Reason in the Thought of Charles S. Peirce', 5.
50. See J E Bormann, S Becker, and M Gershwin, 'Relationship of Frequent Mantram Repetition to Emotional and Spiritual Well-Being in Healthcare Workers', *The Journal of Continuing Education in Nursing*, 37/5, (September–October 2006), 218–24.
51. Dell Hymes, *Foundations in Sociolinguistics: An Ethnographic Approach* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 65.

# Memory

**Swami Satyamayananda**

(Continued from the previous issue)

**V**IEWED BRIEFLY, the picture of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi begins to fade in the mind as soon as the eyes are shut. If the eyes are reopened and lovingly made to watch Holy Mother's picture once again, the first impression becomes deep when the next etches itself on it. Repeatedly done the impression becomes deeper. The deeper the groove the longer it stays in the mind. This is long-term memory in simple terms.

One theory posits a kind of switchboard that takes in what is useful from short-term memory to be stored in long-term memory. Inconsequential thoughts are simply quarantined in it and commence fading in a few moments. Another theory states that since the memory capacity is limited and new things are constantly learnt, older memories blur, fade, and are lost to make space for new experiences. This is necessary, otherwise the old and new experiences may begin to contradict and confuse. Contrarily, some believe that there is just one capacity for storing things. The difference between what is called short and long-term memory is just the difference in learning. In this case the common experience of having something at 'the tip of the tongue' is cited.

## **Different types of memory**

**Recall:** It is the bringing up of impressions subconsciously from subconscious to consciousness. When serially recalled for instance, what one has read of Holy Mother's life from her birth

onwards, step-by-step recalling is better than recalling randomly.

**Recognition:** It takes place when the recalled memory is matched with the object, which could be an internal sensation. To modify a standard illustration from Vedanta, fat Devadatta seen in Kolkata last year is the same thin Devadatta now in Belur Math.

**Relearning or Practice:** Holy Mother's meditation mantra memorised in two minutes is gradually forgotten. After a week one can remember just a few words. Relearning takes less than the original two minutes and on repeated relearning the time required decreases.

**Reminiscences:** These memories don't need to be practised and don't fade easily. Even after many years one can reminisce about the first visit to Holy Mother's birthplace, Jayrambati.

**Eidetic or Photographic:** The mind works like a camera and takes in the contents of a complete page or a whole scene and reproduces it.

**Mnemonic:** A word, number, picture, or even a whole sentence is memorised by tagging another word, picture, sound, taste, or smell. For instance, a person's name William, shortened to Bill, is associated with a billy goat. So whenever William is seen a mnemonic remembers a male goat and recalls the name William.

**Rote:** It is not separately treated by modern studies but combined with relearning or practice. One repeats a verse over and again a number of times mechanically without thinking of its meaning till it gets fixed in the mind.



**Intelligent Memory:** This is superior and more lasting. It is not guesswork but an intelligent grasp of what the next word or picture can be when trying to recall something. One may have forgotten all what has read up till now, from the article's semantic side, but the mind can relate the ideas in one's own words.

**Déjà vu:** It is a common experience lasting from a few seconds to a few minutes. One strongly feels that what is being experienced has been experienced before. Studies are divided as to how it occurs. One explanation is that old perceptions that were recorded subliminally are re-awakened on seeing a place, person, or hearing something. The conscious mind is unaware of them and is left with a feeling of déjà vu.

There are times when one experiences for a few seconds or minutes an overwhelming rush of memories on perceiving something, leaving one literally dazed. At the other extreme, sensory perception fails to recall memories, giving a momentary feeling of suddenly being cut away and detached. The experience also appears to have a dreamlike quality about it.

### **The Attributes of Memory**

The primary attributes of memory are of time, place, and circumstances. The attributes, as it were, cover like a sheath every trace, engram, or impression. If this were absent, there would be confusion of memory. One impression also qualifies other impressions; impressions do not stand isolated but are joined to each other like a net. William James says that remembering is a reconstruction process.

There are patterns to our eyes, body, and face that suggest certain types of memories are being processed. The expressions and postures have been studied: 1) *Looking up and to the right*: signifies a reconstruction of old images or creating new ones; 2) *Looking up and to the left*: means

the subject is accessing eidetic memory; 3) *Looking level and to the right*: means memory sound tracks are being accessed; 4) *Looking down and to the right*: signifies recall of emotions and motor memories; 5) *Looking down and to the left*: implies that a person is resorting to an internal dialogue. Apart from having a faraway look, closed eyes, partly closed and non-focused eyes are the norm when memories are being revived. The body catches and reacts to even the mildest thought that passes in the mind. The most sensitive indicators, besides the eyes, are the breath and fingers.

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**Déjà vu is a common experience lasting from a few seconds to a few minutes. One strongly feels that what is being experienced has been experienced before.**

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With many things crowding the mind there naturally will occur some interference in the workings of the retrieval system. It is generally found that as one approaches the forties one is aware of forgetting simple things like names or whether one has shut the door. Is forgetting natural or unnatural? Generally, mild loss of memory in middle age has not to be taken seriously but if there is a pattern to it, accompanied by behavioural changes like depression and irritation, then, it is serious. Confabulation, the tendency to cover up for one's memory loss while being aware of it, is bad as it can lead to other undesirable disorders. Drugs, cigarettes, alcohol, certain medicines, even some kinds of food and beverages interfere with recall and storage. In most cases memory gradually returns after the toxins have been flushed out of the body. Memory loss is also felt due to either physical or mental fatigue; this loss is reversed after a good night's rest. Inadequate oxygen in the brain also disrupts memory. The side effects of Electro-shock therapy used to treat severe cases of depression and other problems destroy

memories, in some cases, temporarily. Everything decays, including memory; neurons shrink, age, and die, and so do the memories they hold. Psychologists talk about proactive memory where new information is forgotten because of old information. Retroactive is when new information holds the old information from arising.

### **Suppression and Repression**

Suppression is when a thought or memory of something painful and harmful is consciously suppressed, as it would vitiate the mental atmosphere. Repression is done subconsciously; the person himself does not know how and what does it but the same principle as in suppression applies here too. It is inferred that there is another mechanism opposite of the retrieval system that works in keeping certain memories tied down. However, the retrieval system itself can act as a sentinel to quarter certain memories that are harmful to the personality. It is also found that subconscious memories are not forgotten. They work below the conscious mind and influence it. These are the complexes and phobias that cannot be explained rationally.

### **Psychogenesis**

Psychogenesis means the normal or abnormal physical or psychical states that occur due to the clash and interplay of conscious and unconscious forces. Loss of memory is a major symptom of hysteria leading to personality disintegration. Strangely, the person remembers language, certain motor and social skills besides impersonal memory. Generally a very distressing situation precipitates hysteria and unable to tolerate the shock, the mind subconsciously seeks escape through amnesia. Recovery can be after days or even years as the shock wears off. The danger of 'rejected or lost memories' is that they become sufficiently strong and integrated to lead a fairly

independent existence, as witnessed in somnambulism, sleep walking, where the main personality remains asleep while a dissociated second personality takes control and engages in various activities. The second personality is neither asleep nor awake and performs actions, even responds to questions. Repressed memories and desires are activated when the controlling power at check is less vigilant or non-vigilant as in deep sleep. In rare cases this takes a drastic turn, in addition to forgetting personal identity, a person leaves home, wanders away, and even starts a new life with a new identity. In time, it could be even months, the person 'awakes' and wonders what she or he is doing in a strange place. There is no memory at all of what the second personality had done. This second personality uses the psychological and physical assets of the first to operate in. This is known as dissociative *fugue*. There is no faking by the patients and this occurs to normal persons under stress. The baffling and frightening questions regarding who and what is the 'controller' cannot be answered by psychology.

### **Other Psychosis**

Schizophrenia, caused by genetic and negative environments, is characterised by the distortion of reality and of withdrawal from all social standards of ethics and etiquette. A schizophrenic is subject to hallucinations and delusions mainly auditory and visual. The bizarre voices and images are not imaginary but actually occur. These aberrations gradually take over the personality. Researchers, aided with sophisticated scanning machines like PET and fMRI find during hallucinations that the areas responsible for memory, perception, speech, emotions, are highly activated. But something or someone scrambles it up, giving a warped perception of the self and the world.

*(To be continued)*

# REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,  
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications

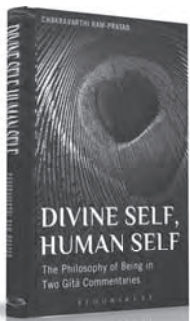


## ***Dharma: Its Early History in Law, Religion, and Narrative*** Alf Hiltebeitel

Oxford University Press, 198 Madison Avenue, New York. Website: [www.oup.com](http://www.oup.com). 2011. xviii + 747 pp. \$ 78. HB. ISBN 9780195394238.

One of the main differences in the idea of religion in the West and that in India comes from the understanding or the lack thereof, of dharma. This book aims to give a better understanding of dharma through an extraordinarily exhaustive account of both the word and the concept through an incisive analysis of Vedic, Buddhist, Puranic, Smṛiti, and bhakti texts, and even some works of literature. This book is the result of ‘cumulative fruitful conversations carried out amicably over subjects of some controversy’ (xi). The author—a professor in the department of religion at the Columbian College of Arts and Sciences, Washington DC—has worked on this book with a feeling that he ‘should reread virtually everything on India’ he has ‘ever read as well as everything’ he has ‘written’ (3). With an exhaustive bibliography running over forty pages, this book is the authoritative reference on everything connected with ‘dharma’.

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## ***Divine Self, Human Self: The Philosophy of Being in Two Gītā Commentaries***

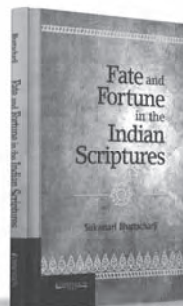
Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad

Bloomsbury Academic, 50 Bedford Square, London WC1B 3DP. Website: [www.bloomsbury.com](http://www.bloomsbury.com). 2012. xii + 272 pp. £ 17.99. PB. ISBN 9781441139245.

The human self is divine and the divine Self manifests in humanity. Being and identity

have been complex issues leading to elaborate commentaries and glosses on various scriptures. The Bhagavadgita, in particular, has been commented on by numerous scholars, traditional and modern alike. This book attempts to unravel the ground of being and the divine Self, both from the perspective of Acharya Shankara and Ramanuja. The author tries to interpret their commentaries on the Gita to ‘develop two competing visions of the relationship between metaphysics and theology, and therefore of how one may relate inquiry to faith’ (xx). In this task, the author has been remarkably successful and he also gives us a wonderful comparative study of Shankara and Ramanuja. Anyone interested in these two thinkers should definitely read this volume.

PB



## ***Fate and Fortune in the Indian Scriptures***

Sukumari Bhattacharji

Foundation Books, Cambridge House, 4381/4 Ansari Road, Daryaganj, New Delhi 110 002. Website: [www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org). 2014. vi + 321 pp. ₹ 895. HB. ISBN 9789382993889.

Why do people become lazy and fatalistic? Because they think that whatever happens in their lives is due to fate. Indians did not want people to become lazy or fatalistic and put the responsibility on the individual for every action one did—one faced the consequences of one’s good and bad actions, and one’s station of birth depended on one’s actions. This not only made a person responsible but also brought hope because if what one has done is the result of one’s previous actions it meant that one’s future could be moulded by oneself. This idea Swami Vivekananda preached and infused and continues to infuse tremendous faith and power into countless minds. But this point has been missed by the

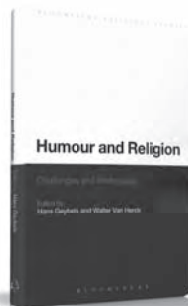
present book, the very beginning of which is on a discordant note. The author contemplated this work as a rebuttal to the objection she faced at a conference where she said 'that the theories of Karman and rebirth were two of the most vicious ever invented by man' (v).

The blind surrender to fate and fortune is indeed bad, but that comes largely due to a wrong understanding of the scriptures. The author laboriously goes through numerous texts and selects cautiously, passages that support her arguments. However, she could have shown the other perspective also where fate or fortune is proclaimed to be in the hands of a person. It is notable that almost all of the translations and works she cites are by authors from outside the Indian tradition, with a Semitic bearing on their thought. The author comes a bit too strongly and without sufficient background material, in brushing aside as inconsequential, years of thought and philosophising in the Indian tradition. Particularly the Mimamsa tradition and the concept of *apurva* is criticised: 'Meditation is treated like currency notes which can be encashed at will, deposited in safe custody for any length of time without increasing or diminishing; it can be lent or donated. But like money it is power and as power it can be used in an invisible spiritual bargaining with fate' (211). When meditation is being increasingly seen as a great solution to present-day problems, and when scientific studies are being conducted on this phenomenon, such a statement could have best been avoided.

The difference between Shruti, eternal wisdom, and Smriti, social codes relevant for a particular time, is not highlighted in this volume. The author quotes more from the Puranas, which are not authoritative texts. Using texts of different paradigms, the author considers it her mission to make the common person recognise 'the vested interests of the guardians of society in maintaining the socio-political and economic *status quo*, with threats of hell and baits of heaven' (244). However, no Eastern tradition gives a concrete validity to the existence of heaven and hell, and they are just some flavours in the religious stories and anecdotes, of which Puranas form a major part. Heaven, hell, fate, and fatalism are

pronouncedly Semitic concepts. Had the author presented a balanced view, this book had the potential to become a remarkable work.

PB



### ***Humour and Religion: Challenges and Ambiguities***

Edited by Hans Geybels and  
Walter Van Herck

Bloomsbury Academic. 2012. xii + 272  
pp. £ 28.99. PB. ISBN 9781441139245.

Religion has many a times been perceived as a sombre affair. Many traditions advocate donning a serious face during religious observances. What is the relation between humour and religion? This book makes an attempt to answer this question through a careful study of various religious traditions like Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and even some religious literature and plays. This anthology is divided into two parts: religious laughter and laughing at religion. Caricature of religion through cartoons and the consequent politics is also examined through an analysis of Greek history. That guilelessness and simplicity are core spiritual values and spirituality has a close connection with humour is well established through this work.

PB



### ***Sir John Woodroffe, Tantra and Bengal: An Indian Soul in a European Body?***

Kathleen Taylor

Routledge, 2 Park Square, Milton  
Park, Abingdon, Oxfordshire OX14  
4RN. Website: [www.routledge.com](http://www.routledge.com).  
2013. xvi + 319 pp. \$ 54.95. PB. ISBN  
9780415749367.

Tantra is probably the most misunderstood spiritual discipline in the world. The principal reason for this is that the source texts are mostly inaccessible and the channelising of basic human desires almost always gives way to taking licence in the name of some spiritual or religious practice. This sublime spiritual discipline would have



remained shrouded in mystery but for the pioneering work of Sir John Woodroffe aka Arthur Avalon, who gave us clear English translations of many Tantric texts. He spent a lifetime in the systematic presentation and exposition of the basic tenets of Tantra, in a time when India, the birth-place of this discipline, was still a slave nation, considered by the West as a land of magic tricks and savage customs.

Sir John Woodroffe was a judge in the High Court of Calcutta. Though belonging to the ruling race, he imbibed the Indian ethos, which led M P Pandit to call him 'truly an Indian Soul in a European body' (vi). He learnt various Sanskrit texts, including those of Tantra, under the tutelage of his friend, Atal Bihari Ghose. The result of the doctoral work of the author, this volume reflects well her painstaking efforts of the investigative trail into the life of Sir John Woodroffe. This book gives a concise yet overall view of the large and multifarious canvas of the personality that Woodroffe was. Including rare photographs, facsimiles of letters and notes, an elaborate bibliography and index, this book fills a void by fulfilling the long-felt need of a good biography of a soul, who preferred to remain anonymous and speak to the world only through this writings under his pen name, Arthur Avalon.

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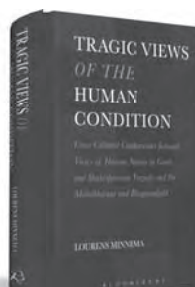
**Sites of Asian Interaction:  
Ideas, Networks and Mobility**  
Edited by Tim Harper and  
Sunil Amrith

Cambridge University Press, Cambridge House, 4381/4 Ansari Road, Daryaganj, New Delhi 110 002. Website: [www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org). 2014. viii + 254 pp. ₹ 795. HB. ISBN 9781107082083.

Transnational encounters are a daily occurrence today. This book explores different inter-Asian interactions and tries to situate them as various paths of communication of ideas and ethos across Asia and studies 'how they are reshaped by myriad encounters along the way' (vii). A collection of essays originally published in a special issue of *Modern Asia Studies* in March 2012, this volume comprises the interactions of various

cultures including Singapore, Ladakh, Penang, and Istanbul. It also traces interactions over the sea and between various religious spaces. Businesses or inter-Asian joint-ventures are also included. Edited by professors of history, this book is a welcome addition to the scarce literature on transnational interactions within Asia.

PB



**Tragic Views of the Human  
Condition**

Lourens Minnema

Bloomsbury Academic. 2013. xii + 572 pp. £ 227.99. HB. ISBN 9781441194244.

This is an extraordinary work of comparative literature studying the depiction of human tragedies from the Eastern and Western perspectives. The author takes the Mahabharata and the Bhagavadgita as samples of the Eastern stand on tragedy and compares it with the Greek and Shakespearean literature. This in-depth analysis shows that the very meaning of the word 'tragedy' changes considerably between these cultures. The narrative, artistic, communicative, social, political, literary, cultural, martial, psychological, ethical, and religious aspects of tragedy are dealt with. The thoroughness of the work is simply amazing and invites the reader to look at tragedy from an informed perspective. This book is a handy reference for all students of comparative literature.

PB



**Truth**

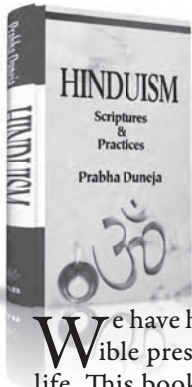
Alexis G Burgess and  
John P Burgess

Princeton University Press, 41 William Street, Princeton, New Jersey 08540, USA. Website: [www.press.princeton.edu](http://www.press.princeton.edu). 2011. xiv + 158 pp. \$ 19.95. PB. ISBN 9780691163673.

Truth and its various connotations have always intrigued us. Professors of philosophy, the authors have done a succinct and critical analysis of some theories of truth: deflationism, indeterminacy, insolubility, realism, and antirealism.

They also deal with the concepts of Alfred Tarski and Saul Kripke and their grey areas. Throughout the volume, one can see the mathematical precision of the reasoning of the concepts presented here that could be a model for all endeavours of research into complex areas of philosophy. This book could be an inspiration for further work on truth.

PB



### **Hinduism: Scriptures and Practices**

Prabha Duneja

New Age Books, Naraina Industrial Area, Phase-I, New Delhi 110 028. Website: [www.newagebooksindia.com](http://www.newagebooksindia.com). 2014. lviii + 448. ₹ 400. PB. ISBN 9788178224527.

We have here a very positive book on the visible presence of Hinduism in our everyday life. This book concludes with a chapter on the status of women in Hindu society: 'At present, a Hindu woman enjoys sufficient freedom at home and in society, while living by the time-honored cherished ideals of Hinduism' (428).

One can never have too many books on the subject. Hinduism is a vast area whose centre is everywhere and boundaries nowhere. There are the scriptures; the Itihasas and Puranas; literature; philosophies; theistic religions; religious practices; art and its renewable dictates; deep social concerns, and the connectivity between human beings. All the time something gets added to it too, like the extension of the Bhagavata cult into the West. Constant study of the ramifications of Hinduism has helped Prabha Duneja interact with people professing religions other than Hinduism. She begins at the beginning: the Vedas and the Upanishads. Then come Manusmriti and the great epics. One may say that Indian culture has drawn from all this to become an inclusive, tolerant, and creative force for the entire world.

Prabha Duneja grapples with the caste problem early in the book. The *varna*-dharma was due to the classification 'based upon the intrinsic qualities and inborn inclinations of human beings' (111). This was but a natural growth to help create an ideal society of mutual interdependence and

aim for achievement in every facet of community living. The motivating ideals are given in detail by the author. What follows will be a great help to the educated Indian who has made one's home in foreign climes as the overwhelming number of gods and goddesses does confound one now and then. Prabha Duneja prefaces the section on Hindu theism with an appropriate quote from the Shvetasvatara Upanishad: 'Just as the oil in the sesame seeds, butter hidden in the curd, water in the sediments of the spring, fire in the wood, so is the Supreme-Self veiled within one's own self and can be perceived by true austerity and knowledge of the soul' (290).

The numerous forms of this Supreme-Self and our own disciplines—call them rituals or *achara*—to draw close to it have evolved to help us gain the Vedantic oneness with God. Often we have 'blind' faith and follow the received tradition in a mechanical manner. This won't do, and so this handbook is most welcome as it explains briefly what we need to know. Prabha Duneja takes in her stride even concepts like yoga and meditation on a chakra. Her use of contemporary diction, which is easily understood by the younger generation is fascinating: 'With regular meditation we can access the software of our conditioned-self. Inner alignment with the same source helps to download the information and be aware of the dormant memories and Samskaras those initiate new actions. In silence we are introduced to the secret codes of our programmed life and the programmer. It allows us to become a witness of our life' (365).

One may say such language could make imperative terms like yoga and chakra sound too simplistic. However, if it helps the learner get interested enough to sail on the oceanic surges of Hinduism down millennia; the new approach indicated in this book is welcome. After all this is how Hinduism has survived and remained as young as in those early days when the Rig Veda lit the Agni of aspiration in the human being: 'The rising sun from beyond the horizon fills the auspicious dawn with a hundred auras of divine light and moves on her way to bless everyone in all the directions' (5).

Prema Nandakumar

Researcher and Literary Critic  
Srirangam

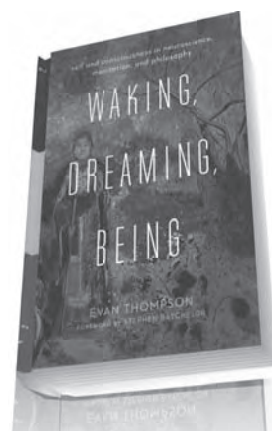
# MANANA

**Exploring thought-currents from around the world.  
Extracts from a thought-provoking book every month.**

## ***Waking, Dreaming, Being***

Evan Thompson

Columbia University Press, New York, NY 10023, 2015.  
xl + 453 pp. \$ 32.95. HB. ISBN 9780231137096.



The central idea of this book is that the self is a process, not a thing or an entity. The self isn't something outside experience, hidden either in the brain or in some immaterial realm. It is an experiential process that is subject to constant change. We enact a self in the process of awareness, and this self comes and goes depending on how we are aware.

When we're awake and occupied with some manual task, we enact a bodily self geared to our immediate environment. Yet this bodily self recedes from our experience if our task becomes an absorbing mental one. If our mind wanders, the mentally imagined self of the past or future overtakes the self of the present moment.

As we start to fall asleep, the sense of self slackens. Images float by, and our awareness becomes progressively absorbed in them. The impression of being a bounded individual distinct from the world dissolves. In this so-called hypnagogic state, the borders between self and not-self seem to fall away.

The feeling of being a distinct self immersed in the world comes back in the dream state. We experience the dream from the perspective of the self within it, or the dream ego. Although the entire dream world exists only as a content of our awareness, we identify our self with only a portion of it—the dream ego that centers our

experience of the dream world and presents itself as the locus of our awareness.

We realize we're dreaming, but instead of waking up, we keep right on dreaming with the knowledge that we're dreaming. We enter what's called a lucid dream. Here we experience a different kind of awareness, one that witnesses the dream state. No matter what dream contents come and go, including the forms the dream ego takes, we can tell they're not the same as our awareness of being in the dream state. We no longer identify only with our dream ego—the 'I' as dreamed—for our sense of self now includes our dreaming self—the 'I' as dreamer.

Similarly, while meditating in the waking state, we can simply witness being conscious and watch whatever sensory or mental events occur within the field of our awareness. We can also watch how we may identify with some of them as 'Me' or appropriate some of them as 'Mine'.

We usually lose touch with this ability to be mindful when we fall asleep. We regain it in a vivid way when we have a lucid dream. Some Indian and Tibetan traditions of philosophy and meditation claim we can recover this mindfulness or witnessing awareness even during deep and dreamless sleep. If this is true, then there must be more to consciousness than just the contents of our waking and dreaming minds.

According to the Indian yogic traditions,

which broadly construed include Buddhism, we can distinguish three aspects of consciousness. The first aspect is awareness, which is often likened to a light that reveals whatever it shines upon. The second aspect is whatever the light illuminates, that is, whatever we happen to be aware of from moment to moment. The third aspect is how we experience some of these contents of awareness as 'I' or 'Me' or 'Mine'. To understand how we enact a self, therefore, we need to understand three things—the nature of awareness as distinct from its sensory and mental contents, and how some of these contents come to be experienced as the self.

I take this threefold framework of awareness, contents of awareness, and self-experience—or what the Indian tradition calls 'I-making'—and put it to work in cognitive science. Whereas the Indian thinkers mapped consciousness and I-making in philosophical and phenomenological terms, I show how their insights can also help to advance the neuroscience of consciousness, by weaving together neuroscience and Indian philosophy in an exploration of wakefulness, falling asleep, dreaming, lucid dreaming, out-of-body experiences, deep and dreamless sleep, forms of meditative awareness, and the process of dying.

The organizing principle for this book comes from the Indian tradition. The ancient Indian texts called the *Upanishads* contain the world's first recorded map of consciousness. The earliest texts—dating from the sixth or seventh century B.C.E.—delineate three principal states of the self—the waking state, the dream state, and the state of deep and dreamless sleep. Later texts add a fourth state—the state of pure awareness. Waking consciousness relates to the outer world and apprehends the physical body as the self. Dream consciousness relates to mental images constructed from memories and apprehends the dream body as the self. In deep and dreamless sleep, consciousness rests in a dormant state not differentiated into

subject and object. Pure awareness witnesses these changing states of waking, dreaming, and dreamless sleep without identifying with them or with the self that appears in them. I use this fourfold structure to organize my exploration of consciousness and the sense of self across the waking, dreaming, and deep-sleep states, as well as meditative states of heightened awareness and concentration.

In the yogic traditions, meditation trains both the ability to sustain attention on a single object and the ability to be openly aware of the entire field of experience without selecting or suppressing anything that arises.

Although cognitive science and the Indian yogic traditions of philosophy and meditation form the core of this book, I also draw from a wide range of other sources—poetry and fiction, Western philosophy, Chinese Daoism, and personal experience. By weaving together these diverse sources, I hope to demonstrate a new way to relate science and what many people like to call spirituality. Instead of being either opposed or indifferent to each other, cognitive science and the world's great contemplative traditions can work together on a common project—understanding the mind and giving meaning to human life. Two extreme and regressive tendencies mark our era—the resurgence of religious extremism and outmoded belief systems, and the entrenchment of scientific materialism and reductionism. Neither mindset realises the value of meditation and the contemplative way of life as a source of wisdom and firsthand knowledge essential to a mature cognitive science that can do justice to our entire way of being—to our spirit, to use an older idiom. By enriching science with contemplative knowledge and contemplative knowledge with cognitive science, we can work to create a new scientific and spiritual appreciation of human life, one that no longer requires or needs to be contained within either a religious or an antireligious framework.





# REPORTS



*Inauguration of Prajna Bhavan, Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University*

## **Headquarters**

The birthday of Swami Vivekananda was celebrated at **Belur Math** on Monday, 12 January 2015. Thousands of devotees attended the celebration throughout the day. Cooked prasada was served to about 37,000 devotees. Swami Vishwanathananda presided over the public meeting held in the afternoon.

## **News of Branch Centres**

In response to our request, UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) has established an official cooperation relationship with the Ramakrishna Mission for a period of six years. **Ramakrishna Mission Seva Pratishthan** conducted a round-the-clock medical camp during Makara Sankranti Mela at Sagar Island in South 24-Parganas district from 10 to 15 January. In all, 5,226 patients were treated, out of which 40 received indoor medical care. Besides, 150 blankets and about 4,500 copies of religious books were distributed among the pilgrims. On the occasion of Gangasagar Mela, **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Manasadvip** organised a camp at the Mela area from 12 to 16 January. In all, 835 pilgrims were provided with free board and lodging at the camp and the Ashrama. Besides, free meals were served to about 250 non-resident pilgrims daily. Discourses and devotional singing were also arranged in the camp. Swami Suhitananda, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission,

inaugurated the newly constructed homeopathy dispensary building and a multipurpose building at **Ramakrishna Math, Palai** on 20 January. Two primary school buildings at **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Manasadvip** were inaugurated on 20 January. Swami Suhitananda declared open the new monks' quarters at **Nettayam** sub-centre of **Ramakrishna Ashrama, Thiruvananthapuram** on 22 January, the holy birthday of Swami Brahmanandaji Maharaj. On the sacred Saraswati Puja Day, 24 January, Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj, President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the building Prajna Bhavan at **Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University, Belur**, which would house (i) School of Mathematical Sciences, (ii) School of Indian Heritage, and (iii) Central Library and Central Computer Facilities Block. On this occasion, Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj also released a Bengali biography of Alasinga Perumal published by the University. On 24 January, the holy Saraswati Puja day, Srimat Swami Vagishanandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the building named Vivek Bhavan at **Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Silchar** that would house a study hall, a library and classrooms for the hostel boys, and a bookshop. The Governor of Arunachal Pradesh, Lt General (Retired) Nirbhay Sharma, visited **Ramakrishna Mission, Narottam Nagar** on 30 January and presided over the annual prize-giving

ceremony of its school. International Diabetes Federation (IDF), Brussels, Belgium, has bestowed recognition to Certified Diabetes Educator-India (CDEI) programme at **Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Vrindaban** for excellence in providing diabetes education to healthcare professionals. The programme is being conducted under the auspices of Manav Seva Foundation, Chesterfield, Missouri, USA. So far there are only 12 diabetes education programmes worldwide recognised by IDF. **Ramakrishna Mission Swami Vivekananda's Ancestral House and Cultural Centre** has been awarded Amiya Nath Sadhu Memorial Challenge Trophy for the year 2013-4 by the Association of Voluntary Blood Donors, West Bengal, for mobilising a large number of blood donors in that year. The award consisted of a trophy, a memento, and a certificate.

**Ramakrishna Mission, Malaysia** conducted a devotees' convention on 27 and 28 December 2014, which was inaugurated by T S Tirumurti, High Commissioner of India to Malaysia. In all, 300 devotees including representatives of six non-affiliated centres in Malaysia attended the convention. This was the first time when so many non-affiliated centres in Malaysia joined hands with us in holding an all-Malaysian convention.

## Relief

**Hudbud Cyclone Relief • Andhra Pradesh:** **Visakhapatnam** centre distributed 1,059 solar lanterns and 2,118 blankets among 1,059 families in 4 areas of Visakhapatnam district from 2 to 9 January.

**Flood Relief • India: Jammu and Kashmir:** Jammu centre continued its relief work among the people affected by flash floods and landslides in the state. The centre distributed 2,000 corrugated sheets, 400 iron pipes (20 feet each), 744 blankets, 689 shawls, 834 jackets, and 450 sets of utensils (each set containing 2 cooking pots, 5 plates, 5 mugs, 5 spoons, and 1 ladle) among 477 families of 52 villages in Jammu district from 2 to 14 January.

**Disturbance Relief • Assam:** On 4 January, **Guwahati** centre distributed 200 kg chira (rice flakes), 100 kg gur (molasses), 135 kg milk powder, 40 kg protein powder, 400 saris, 150 dhotis, 100 shawls, 150 kg detergent powder, and 500 bars of washing soap among 650 people in Mazbat, Udalguri district, who were affected by the recent ethnic disturbance in the state.

**Storm Relief • Andhra Pradesh:** In the wake of a severe storm on 1 January caused by depression in the Bay of Bengal, **Visakhapatnam** centre distributed 1,430 kg rice, 220 kg dal, 220 kg dry peas, 220 kg edible oil, 220 kg salt, 5 kg chilli powder, 5 kg turmeric powder, and 44 kg pickles among 220 affected families in M Sunnapalli area of Tekkali Mandal in Srikakulam district on 7 January.

**Distress Relief •** The following centres distributed various items, mentioned against their names, to needy people: **Agartala:** 146 mosquito nets from 17 December to 8 January. **Antpur:** 331 saris and 59 dhotis from 1 November to 18 December. **Cherrapunji:** 200 saris in December and January. **Ichapur:** 189 garments and 11 slates from 5 to 14 November. **Jayrambati:** 4,465 saris and 500 dhotis from 23 November to 17 January. **Malliankaranai:** 152 dhotis on 12 January. **Midnapore:** 235 saris and 10 dhotis from 25 November to 24 December. **Naora:** 775 saris, 200 dhotis from 1 November to 2 January, and 100 kg potatoes, 100 kg rice, 35 mosquito nets, and 25 utensil-sets (each set containing a pot, a deep pan, a bucket, a plate, and a tumbler) from 20 December and 10 January. **Narottam Nagar:** 163 T-shirts in the month of January. **Puri Math:** 25 dhotis and 25 chaddars from 11 December to 22 January. **Rahara, Kolkata:** 210 mosquito nets, 200 saris, 15 dhotis, 87 chaddars, 13 frocks, 13 churidars, 40 bed-sheets, 27 pants, 24 shirts, 864 vials (40 ml) of coconut oil, and 9 bicycles on 13 December, and 14 shirts, 14 pants, 16 frocks, and 9 churidars on 4 January. **Ramharipur:** 400 saris and 100 dhotis from 22 September to 24 November.

**Economic Rehabilitation •** The following centres handed over sewing machines to poor and needy people: **Chandipur:** 2 machines on 21 January, **Cherrapunji:** 15 machines in the month of December, **Rahara (Kolkata):** 10 machines on 13 December.





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## RAMAKRISHNA MISSION BOYS' HOME

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Phone : 033-25682850 / 3219, 25237666 / 6116 (Secy)

(A Branch Centre of Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math, Howrah 711202)

e-mail : rkmraharahome@gmail.com



### APPEAL FROM THE BOYS' OWN HEART



**The future may be blighted for these young inmates of the Ramakrishna Mission Boys' Home at Rahara if the Institution is not rescued from debt.**

'The poor, the illiterate, the ignorant, the afflicted—let these be your God.

Know that Service to thee alone is the highest religion.'

—*Swami Vivekananda.*

1943. The year of the great Bengal famine, a penniless eight year old boy, Bishnupada, finds his way to a camp for the starving. Except for his widowed mother, the others in his family were victims of the deadly famine. His future is undoubtedly as bleak as that of the thousands of men and children who had succumbed to cruel hunger.

1980. Dr Bishnupada Halder, Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians, emerges as a distinguished medical man. What is the connection between the physician and the stray, you may ask? It is the Ramakrishna Mission Boys' Home at Rahara in Kolkata.

This is an institution that has nurtured hundreds of orphans and lost or abandoned children since 1944, when it began its generous efforts in a very small way with 37 boys. The boy who became Dr Bishnupada Halder was one of them.

Today, 600 orphan, destitute, and scheduled-tribe boys, between the ages of 6 to 18 years, live here entirely free of charge. 90% of them are fatherless, the mothers perhaps eking out a miserable livelihood by doing menial jobs. In 5% of the cases the fathers are seriously sick, disabled, or of an unsound mind. Some boys have been sent from borstal jails.

But they have something apart from sorrow in common. They are all intelligent, hard-working, and serious minded. Given help and opportunities they may all make India proud. In fact some have already given ample evidence of their academic brilliance. All who sat for the Matriculation Examination not only secured first division marks, but some even secured more than 80%. There is also hope for those with little aptitude for academics as they are provided with vocational training. All need these resources.

The fixed per capita monthly government grant for each boy per month is ₹ 1,250/-. By this meagre amount, we have to provide food, education, clothing, medicine, diet for the sick, fuel, and other expenditures such as electricity, water charges, sanitary, salaries of teachers, cooks, and helpers. Can a growing child be brought up with this slender amount in these inflationary times? The monthly expenses to meet even the basic needs of each boy for food, books, stationery, medicines, and clothes exceed the per capita government grant by at least ₹ 1,356/-. Even these monthly grants are not coming regularly. Sometimes we even have to wait for up to 4 or 5 months for receiving the grants. The actual expenditure for a boy comes to ₹ 2,606 /- per month.

Thus the Home has been running with a huge amount of deficit, which is accumulating with every passing year on account of a steady rise in prices of all essential commodities. Most of the income of the Home is used up in meeting the deficits. Implementation of certain important projects for the benefit of the boys have been withheld due to the non-availability of funds. It has also not been possible to make any improvement in the standard of maintenance for the boys, although it is urgently necessary.







Does this mean a dead end for the boys? Just because there is no money! For the never-say-die-spirit at the Home, the immediate target is to build up a Permanent Fund, the income from which will enable it to continue its services.

And certainly public generosity has not dried up. This is clear from the declaration of concern from so many who profess to 'care'. For them, now is the time to demonstrate that they actually do.

We invite the sympathetic attention of all well-wishers of the Boys' Home to this appeal. We fervently hope in this matter that your valuable help will not be wanting. If for any reason it is not possible for you, at the present, to render assistance in any other form, kindly help by bringing the above appeal to the notice of all of your friends, relatives, and other acquaintances, who are sympathetic to our cause. This will indeed be a great service to the Boys' Home for which we shall remain ever grateful.

Apart from maintaining 600 orphans, destitute and



scheduled-tribe boys, the Home runs the following educational Institutions : (i) Junior Basic School, (ii) Junior High School, (iii) High School, (iv) Industrial Training Centre, (v) Primary Teachers' Training Institute, (vi) Brahmananda College of Education (B.Ed), (vii) Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Centenary College, (viii) Vocational Training in Carpentry, Tailoring, Printing, Bookbinding, Electrical Maintenance, and Electronics, (ix) Non-formal School, (x) Night School. The total strength of all these institutions is about 4,200.

As the above institutions are running under the control and management of the Home, the Boys' Home has to spare funds according to its needs for the proper improvement of all these institutions. Mainly the boys of low and middle income group



families attend these institutions for their education.

We take this opportunity of inviting you all to come and see for yourselves the activities that are going on at the Boys' Home.

**(Swami Jayananda)**  
**Secretary**

Cheques and drafts may kindly be drawn in favour of **Ramakrishna Mission Boys' Home**. Donations are exempted from Income Tax under Section 80-G(5) (vi) of the Income Tax Act, 1961.

The Boys' Home is situated on the eastern side of the Khardah Station of the Sealdah-Ranaghat Railway Line. It can also be reached from the B T Road by car or bus along the Khardah Station Road.

**For the welfare of the orphan, destitute and scheduled-tribe boys  
of Ramakrishna Mission Boys' Home, Rahara, Kolkata 700118**



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# Swami Vireswarananda - A Divine Life

**Editor : Swami Chaitanyananda**

**English Editor : Swami Satyamayananda & Shri Tirthankar Dasgupta**



The English Edition of the above book will be **published shortly at Ramakrishna Mission, Khar, Mumbai**. The book comprises of the life, teachings, letters and selected special discourses of Revered Maharaj, alongwith about 200 Photographs, in two volumes, contributed by senior and junior monks, nuns, devotees and admirers from India and abroad.

**The Price of the Book : Rs. 300/- per set (two volumes),  
Postage : Rs. 60/- per set.**

**Pre-publication price: Rs. 250/-, Postage: Rs. 60 per set.**

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The Hindi Edition (Edited by Swami Videhatmananda) of the above book has already been published. The book is available from the above Distributor, as also at various centres of Ramakrishna Mission.

**Price R. 300/- per set (two volumes), Postage Rs. 60/- per set.**

The Bengali Edition of the above book (already published) is also available from various Centres of Ramakrishna Mission and the following Distributor :

**Udbodhan Office**  
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**Price Rs. 200/-, Postage Rs. 50/-**

## **SWAMI VIRESWARANANDA SMRITI COMMITTEE**

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